THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON EARLY VICTORIAN LITERATURE

ABSTRACT

THESIS SUBMITTED
TO ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

ENGLISH

BY

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Under the supervision of

Dr. MOHAMMAD YASEEN

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY
ALIGARH (INDIA)

1984

ABSTRACT

For two decades (1838-1858) the Chartist Movement had made its deep impact on British society. The ruling classes in Britain, especially during the first decade (1838-48), were faced with the difficult task of putting down a popular movement which threatened to put an end to their authority. Workers from all walks of life demonstrated in favour of a simple and straightforward political programme. Universal suffrage was the main point in the Charter which was persistently demanded by the lower orders. During those turbulent years, several organizations were formed and a host of published material was produced.

The pulse of the literary circles was quickened by the social turmoil. Writers from the upper as well as the lower classes came out with books, pamphlets, plays, sermons, broadsides, hymns and songs, either encouraging or discouraging the Chartists. While Carlyle, Disraeli, Mrs Gaskell and Kingsley reflect in their writings the different views and attitudes of the upper social echelons, the Chartist writers, such as Ernest Jones, J.H. Wheeler, Thomas Cooper and Gerald Massey, tried to give utterance to the grievances of the workers and strongly reacted to the distorted picture of their Movement

as depicted by their class enemies and rivals.

In his introduction to An Anthology of Chartist Literature (1956), Y.V. Kovalev laments the fact that not a single major work had been devoted to the study of Chartist literature as a whole. Since then, and to the best of my knowledge, the only comprehensive study of Chartist poetry and fiction has been made by Professor Martha Vicinus of Indiana University; but it only constitutes a chapter in her valuable book, The Industrial Muse : A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature (1974). The present study is an attempt to meet the need to explore, in greater detail, literary works by Chartist writers and to relate them to their times.

Chapter One, in this thesis, is taken up mainly with certain historical facts and events and divided into two sections. The first charts out the development of radical ideas in Britain since the times of Milton, and which had been enriched by the writings and efforts of Wilkes, Cartwright, the London Corresponding Society, Tom Paine, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. Literary works of radical significance by Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Shelley and Byron are also referred to.

Section B is concerned with the immediate social conditions which gave rise to the Chartist Movement, its leaders, its peak periods as well as its demise.

Chapter Two discusses the reaction of non-working-class writers, such as Carlyle, Mrs Gaskell, Disraeli and Kingsley, to the Chartist Movement and the lamentable conditions of the poor at the time. It concludes that all four writers sympathised, in one degree or another, with the suffering lower classes and raised their voices to warn the authorities of the dire consequences of neglecting them. They blamed the middle class for exploiting the poor and demanded the reformation of the Aristocracy and the Church as well as the Middle Class. But they also condemned Chartism and the Chartist Movement and dreaded their dangerous implications and the violence engendered by the mass demonstrations.

In the face of attacks levelled at the Movement, the Chartist cause found its defenders and vindicators in T.M. Wheeler and Ernest Jones. Sunshine and Shadow, by the former, and De Brassier, by the latter, are discussed in Chapter Three. These two writers set out to refurbish the tarnished picture of the Movement and exonerate its membership. The concept of class struggle forms the ideological cornerstone of their novels. The basic content in the two works is the

actual history of the Chartist Movement and its weaknesses. But while Wheeler's novel exposes the inadequacy of Chartist leadership at crucial moments, Jones's concentrates on the role of class enemies within the movement who masquerade as friends of the people in order to achieve their personal aims.

Chapter Four is devoted to the discussion of Thomas Cooper's epic, The Purgatory of Suicides and how far the author was influenced by classical epics. Cooper's condemnation of the present was vehement and his hope in the future unbounded. Although he was born into a poor family and orphaned while still a small child, his epic reflects the wide range of his readings in history, philosophy, science and literature. The contemporary social scene in Britain is eagerly explored and passionately denounced. Cooper's attitude towards religion, too, finds expression in his poem. Utopian ideas permeate his colossal work which is a monument of erudition. Milton, Shelley and Shakespeare are among the poets who markedly have their impact on Cooper's magnum opus.

Ernest Jones's poetry has largely been ignored by critics of English literature. In Chapter Five, claims of fine artistic talent and deep insight into life are made on his behalf. Jones, who wrote several poems to the tune of popular airs and in ballad forms and had his poems sung by

workers at huge Chartist gatherings, is briefly compared and contrasted with Kipling whose literary fame is jealously guarded and propelled, every now and then. It is also pointed out that several Shelleyan ideas and attitudes find their echoes in Jones who was undoubtedly endowed with the power of humanizing natural phenomena. His Revolt of Hindostan, an epic in miniature written in heroic couplets, reflects favourably on its author's artistic powers and on his ideological honesty and consistency in defending not only the working classes in Europe but also the oppressed peoples of the colonies.

Chapter Six is a critical survey of Gerald Massey's poetry, preceded by a brief discussion of his thoughts and ideas. His language is shown to be, on the one hand, emotional, expressive and rich; on the other, inflated and declamatory. Despite heavy politicizing his poetry reflects his love of nature, which endows scores of his poems with sweet and rare lyricism. His rhythm, as that of ballads, is sometimes leaping, sometimes lingering and his martial music has an irresistible force. Gerald Massey proved quite an adept at using the technique of montage and typical ballad virtues and motifs are embodied in his poems. For a short period of time, he shone like a meteor but soon turned away from poetry.

The Conclusion sums up the achievements of the writers and poets discussed in the main body of the thesis and relates them to the works of some later writers, such as William Morris and Robert Tressell. It also refers to the continued relevance of their themes to modern times.

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I certify that Mr. JOSEPH NADER BOULOS worked under my supervision for his doctoral thesi entitled "The Chartist Movement and its Impact on Early Victorian Literature". To the best of my knowledge his work is an original contribution to knowledge.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

While doing my M.A. course at the University of Keele, England, in 1974-76, I first came across the names of Thomas Cooper, Ernest Jones, Gerald Massey, and others. By mere chance I also got hold of a copy of Y.V. Kovalev's An Anthology of Chartist Literature (1956) and another of Professor Martha Vicinus's The Industrial Muse (1974). These three agents, the course I was doing and the two books mentioned above, combined to arouse my interest in Chartist literature, and the idea of devoting my doctoral thesis to the study of the impact of the Chartist Movement on the literature of the period was then conceived.

In writing this thesis I have incurred many debts. I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Mohammad Yaseen of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, upon whom fell most of the burden of carefully reading the drafts and correcting the manuscript, all of which he bore cheerfully despite his heavy responsibilities. Without his guidance and encouragement, this work could not have been completed. I have great pleasure in acknowledging my profound gratitude to him.

I would also like to thank Professor Masoodul Hasan, Chairman of the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, for kindly reading, commenting on, and assessing

parts of my work. My gratitude, too, goes to Professor A.A. Ansari, former Chairman of the Department, and Professor A. Bose, formerly of Calcutta University. My deepest debt, however, is to Dr. R.C. Sharma of P.C. Bagla College, Hathras, who has generously given me access to his collection of rare works by Chartist writers. As an overseas student, I wish also to thank all those who have helped guide my steps in the Indian sub-continent.

My list of indebtedness is incomplete without due mention of the invaluable help rendered me by the efficient and courteous staff of the British Council Library, Delhi, and, in particular, that of Mrs. N. Siddiqi. The services of those of Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh, are not to be minimized.

I would also take this opportunity to thank my wife and two children for their patience in the face of the hardships they have had to put up with while this work was in progress.

Last, I wish to thank Mr Mohd Waseem Khan, the typist, for the pains he took in typing this thesis.

Joseph Nader Boulos

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PREFACE

The publication of the Charter in 1838 not only heralded the entry of the working class in British politics but also resulted in a huge mass movement. Three petitions were unsuccessfully submitted to Parliament seeking mainly the implementation of the principle of universal suffrage. The Chartists failed to achieve their immediate goal. However, the giant movement left its impact on the literature as well as the politics and economics of the period.

Carlyle, Disraeli, Mrs Gaskell and Kingsley were among those writers who raised, in their various ways, the 'condition of England ' question. They sympathised with the poor but reacted, to say the least, unfavourably to the growing power of the Chartist Movement. Their reaction amply reveals their class allegiance.

There was another group of writers who believed in the doctrine of class struggle and wrote accordingly. It comprised novelists and poets such as Ernest Jones, T.M. Wheeler, Thomas Frost, Thomas Cooper, W.J. Linton and Gerald Massey.

The present study focuses on the reaction of these two groups to the popular demands of the Chartists. More space is allotted to the latter group for the simple reason that a few

works have so far been published on some of its individual members, such as R.J. Conklin's book, Thomas Cooper, the Chartist (1935) and Professor John Saville's introduction to his Ernest Jones, Chartist (1952), and which are mainly biographical. The only two critical studies of Chartist literature, as a whole, are Y.V. Kovalev's introduction to his Anthology of Chartist Literature (1956) and a chapter in Martha Vicinus's The Industrial Muse (1974); but because of limited space, each Chartist writer is briefly discussed in them.

The contents of this thesis are as follows : Chapter One is a historical survey of the Chartist Movement and the radical ideas and movements which preceded it; Chapter Two traces the reaction of Carlyle, Mrs Gaskell, Disraeli and Kingsley to Chartism; Chapter Three is devoted to a discussion of two novels by T.W. Wheeler and Ernest Jones; Cooper's epic, The Purgatory of Suicides, is critically studied in Chapter Four while Jones's and Massey's poetry is discussed in Chapters Five and Six, respectively. The Conclusion sums up the artistic achievements of these writers and underlines their continued relevance to modern times.

The present study is more selective than exhaustive. More research work is in fact needed to cover not only other aspects of the writings included but also other works by other

writers, such as those by W.J. Linton, John Watkins and Thomas Frost.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

The Chartist Movement

A : Antecedents :

The Chartists are inextricably embedded in the radical English tradition which can be traced, in their case, as far back as Milton and the Commonwealth. They deeply revered Milton and looked reverently back to his glorious times. Like him, they were Republicans and, in many cases, Dissenters, opposed to Royalty and the corrupt Church of England. His unorthodox views on marriage and divorce were pointed out, underlined and contrasted with those of contemporary bigots who objected to divorce on the grounds that it was unscriptural. Articles on Milton, in the Chartist press, focussed attention on his support for the causes of democracy, liberty and equality, and the Chartists were exhorted to read his works and learn from them.

The Chartists were also the inheritors of radical ideas propagated since 1760 by people like John Wilkes and Major John Cartwright. The former opposed George III who tried to monopolise all political powers. He edited the North Briton (1762), which was started to reveal the vices and atrocities of the monarch and to disseminate Wilkes's

views. Wilkes and his followers were partly instrumental in demolishing the theory of the Divine Right of kings and managed to enlist the support of the people. He assailed the dependency of Parliament on the Crown and its unrepresentative nature. Despite persecution and repression, Wilkes persevered in his campaign against the king and his ministers and in defending the individual rights of the free-born citizen. In 1776, the year of the American Declaration of Independence, Wilkes upheld in the House of Commons the political rights of the poor who, he said,

> has important rights respecting his personal liberty, that of his wife and children, his property however inconsiderable, his wages ... which are in many trades and manufactures regulated by the power of Parliament ... Some share therefore in the power of making those laws which deeply interest them... should be reserved even to this inferior but most useful set of men ... 1

In the same year (1776), the veteran radical, Major John Cartwright, whose life spanned several decades and who worked for an overall change in the established order, published his pamphlet, Take Your Choice, in which he demanded the implementation of four of the later six Chartist points : annual parliaments, equal electoral districts, payment of Members of Parliament, and adult

1. Quoted in E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Penguin, 1974, p. 91.

manhood suffrage.[2] He later advocated the secret ballot. And these were the main claims of radical political reformers since 1776 and constituted five of the six points of the Charter.

The ideas and views defended and propagated by both Wilkes and Cartwright worked as nuclei for the growing political societies which sprang up in the latter part of the eighteenth century and which began to highlight the grievances of their members and protest against unconstitutional taxation. The Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights, whose sole object was the defence of legal and constitutional liberty, was founded in 1769. To further the cause of Parliamentary reform, the Society of Constitutional Information was founded in 1780. Several other societies were formed in different towns to try and win the support of working-class people to their views, to carry on public protests and to petition the House of Commons.

With the advent of the French Revolution in 1789, the English radicals were further encouraged in their fight for the democratic rights of the masses. The 1790s were dominated by the activities of the English Jacobins or

2. At the time of the Commonwealth, the Levellers advocated the demands of annual parliaments and universal manhood suffrage, excluding from the suffrage those who were in receipt of "wages and alms", for "It was probably felt that servants would vote as their masters told them". See Henry Holorenshaw, The Levellers And The English Revolution, Victor Gollancz LTD., London, 1939, p. 57

reformers, the London Corresponding Society, Tom Paine, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft as well as by the terror unleashed against them by the Pitt Governments, Reeves' Anti-Jacobin Society, the 'Church and King' rioters, and the Combination Acts (1799-1800). Thomas Hardy, a shoemaker, was the founder and first Secretary of the L.S.C., which came into existence in January 1792. The main goals of the L.S.C. were parliamentary reform, universal suffrage, and annual parliaments. Tom Paine, who strongly and vehemently wrote against the Monarch and in defence of the political rights of the unpropertied, had his Rights of Man banned as seditious libel and was forced to fly for his life. Mary Wollstonecraft, with her Rights of Woman, championed the cause of women and initiated for them a very long era of struggle to win their full democratic rights. In her novel, The Wrongs of Woman (1798), published posthumously by William Godwin, she gives her views on the laws of marriage and divorce as well as on the oppression and suffering undergone by married women a fictitious form.[3]

3. The main theme in her novel is the helplessness and inability of women to get divorced of their faithless husbands. Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments find their echo in John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women (1869), in which he criticizes the backward outlook of regarding women as slaves, as well as in Thomas Hardy's novels, particularly in Jude the Obscure, written nearly a hundred years later. Although there is little similarity between her novel and Ernest Jones's Woman's Wrongs (1851-52), the two have, at least, one main

Continued on Next Page

Compared to Paine's writings Godwin's are less passionate and moving. Nevertheless, they are deeper, more philosophical and had greater impact on the radical English intellectuals of the 1790s. For some years, Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge came under the influence of Godwin's ideas. They regarded him with deep veneration and continually studied and discussed his book, Political Justice (1793), in which he assailed poverty (as main cause of crime), as well as monarchy and the aristocracy. Godwin accused kings and aristocrats of despotism and of legislating with the sole object of robbing the poor and serving their vested interests. He demanded the abolition of government, monarchy and the aristocracy and maintained that this would lead to the cessation of wars. He also believed in the perfectibility of man, who is susceptible of perpetual improvement, and envisaged a future rural society based on equality of opportunity to all its members. In The Enquirer (1797), Godwin condemns the whole social structure and his attack on the clergy is outspoken. He coupled priests with kings as

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Continued :

goal in common; the defence of woman. In writing his novel, Jones's aim, as he declares it, is "to reflect in simple language, the domestic wrongs and sorrows of society" (in Notes to the People, Vol. II, p. 515). It is however noticeable that while Wollstonecraft's novel emphasises the importance of the dissolubility of marriage, Jones's is much more taken up with the discussion of the economic hardships encountered by women and with the right of the latter to choose their own husbands.

as the arch-enemies of human liberty. In Caleb Williams (1794), the best of Godwin's novels, he includes the essence of the criticism he had previously levelled at society in his Political Justice. The novel is a thorough-going condemnation of the 'tyranny of wealth' as illustrated by the characters of Tyrrel and Folkland, each in his own way. One of his characters in the novel, Benjamin Hawkins, who bears similarity to the Poacher in Ernest Jones's De Brassier, is driven to crime by his poverty, and the narrator exclaims in his defence :

> O poverty! thou art indeed omnipotent! Thou grindest us into desperation; thou confoundest all our boasted and most deep-rooted principles; fillest us to the very brim with malice and revenge and renderest us capable of acts of unknown horror! [4]

In another novel of his, Fleetwood (1805), Godwin exposes, among other things, the cruel abuse of children employed in factories. His presentation of this social problem is of considerable importance because it anticipated the arguments of many other reformers by about thirty years.

The English radicals of the 1790s were brutally repressed. Some were transported to Botany Bay; others suffered long years of imprisonment. Terror and disillusionment

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4. W. Godwin, Caleb Williams, O.U.P., 1982, Vol. II, ch.2,p. 116.

with developments in France had their effect on many of those courageous and self-sacrificing men. Pitt and the ruling British oligarchy achieved their aim in destroying the radical movement in Britain, for the time being. However, the movement gathered momentum again when the Napoleonic wars were over but received a series of serious and crushing blows at the hands of Castlereagh, Sidmouth and Eldon.

It was during these years that Byron and Shelley distinguished themselves by challenging the system and championing the cause of the poor. The two young poets had their lives linked, in more than one way, to that of Godwin. Shelley ran away with Godwin's daughter, Mary, and then married her after Harriet, his first wife, committed suicide in 1816. Claire Clairmont, daughter of Godwin's second wife, was seduced by Byron and gave birth to the fair child, Allegra. However, the two young poets, particularly Shelley, were linked to Godwin in another way. They were social rebels opposed, like Godwin, to the contemporary social system under which they lived.

Godwin's influence on Shelley is so pervasive that H.N. Brailsford advises his readers to study Godwin before reading Shelley, and says, "To attempt to understand Shelley without the aid of Godwin is a task hardly more promising than

it would be to read Milton without the Bible".[5] Queen Mab, in the words of the same writer, "is nothing but Godwin in verse ..."[6] The poem reflects Shelley's dedication to the principles of benevolence and love and envisages a happy, idealistic future. In The Revolt of Islam, he pursues his attack on tyranny and underlines the importance of love. News of the massacre of Peterloo (1819), when it reached him in his exile in Italy, excited him and the result is chiefly manifested in two of his poems, The Mask of Anarchy and "Song to the Men of England". Militant Chartists, as Carl Woodring tells us,[7] secretly distributed the latter, including the menacing stanza :

> Sow seed, — but let no tyrant reap;
> Find wealth, — let no impostor heap;
> Weave robes, — let not the idle wear;
> Forge arms, — in your defence to bear.

Such lines as well as others, mainly from The Mask of Anarchy, Revolt of Islam, and Promethous Unbound find their echo in several Chartist songs and poems. In the London centennial meeting on Shelley, arranged in 1892 by G.W. Foote, the president of the National Secular Society, and attended, among others, by G.B. Shaw, Shelley was described as a major inspirer of the Chartist Movement[8] and Queen Mab as the

5. H.N. Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle, London, 1913, p. 212.
6. Ibid., p. 175.
7. See. Carl Woodring, Politics in English Romantic Poetry, Harvard U.P., 1970, p. 263.
8. It is worth remembering that Shelley's Poetical Works were twice published in 1839.

Chartists' Bible.[9] Shelley's dream of a golden age caught the imagination of some Chartist poets, such as Thomas Cooper and Ernest Jones.

Lord Byron, in 1812, made his first major speech in the House of Lords in defence of the Nottingham frame-breakers. The same year witnessed his vigorous and scathing "Ode to the Framers of the Frame Bill", in which he ironically attacks the sponsors of the new act. In Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Byron strongly expresses his sympathy for the downtrodden. His Don Juan assails the aristocracy, the House of Commons and the Clergy, and predicts the end of the tyranny of kings. The Vision of Judgment is a sarcastic and humorous attack on George III and Robert Southey whom Byron describes as a boring sycophant. Byron also upholds the cause of Freedom in its widest sense. Several lines from different poems by Byron were frequently quoted by the Chartists and inscribed on banners in their huge processions. In his book, The Condition of the Working-Class in England, 1844, Engels maintains that :

> it is the workers who are most familiar with the poetry of Shelley and Byron. Shelley's prophetic genius has caught their imagination, while Byron attracts their sympathy by his sensuous fire and by the virulence of his satire against the existing order. 10

9. Roland A. Duerksen, Shelleyan Ideas in Victorian Literature, London, 1966, p. 173.
10. Quoted by Y.V. Kovalev in his Introduction to Anthology of Chartist Literature, translated into English by J.C. Dumbreck and Michael Beresford, Victorian Studies, Vol II, no. 2, 1958, p. 126.

B : The Chartist Movement Proper :

The English working class, a product of the Industrial Revolution, added a new-dimension to the spectrum of British politics. Its political consciousness, which took some time to mature, developed in factories and pits and under the direct influence of the American and French revolutions. For decades, the workers waged a prolonged struggle against the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800. The Luddites led the old handicrafts-men and handloom weavers, now doomed after the introduction of new machines, in a desperate revolt which found expression in machine-breaking. The agitation of Cobbett and Orator Hunt kept the flame of revolt ablaze. Peterloo, in 1819, was an important link in the long march of the poor. In the agitation for the Reform Bill, the workers, the artisans and the lower middle class had fought in unity with the industrial bourgeoisie and bore the brunt of the struggle. After the passage of the 1832 Reform Act in Parliament, the latter deserted their allies who felt betrayed. The workers fell back on their trade unions with the hope of getting some economic concessions. But their hopes were cruelly frustrated with the collapse of the General National Council of Trades Unions and the transportation of the Tolpuddle Martyrs to Australia in 1834.

The New Poor Law (1834) added to their misfortune. The old Poor Law had given parish relief for the aged in their own homes and outdoor relief for unemployed workers. The New Poor Law came as a blow to the poor and put an end to their old way of life. Boards of guardians were appointed or elected to run the new workhouses, which were worse than prisons. Outdoor relief was stopped and the families of the poor were broken up. The New Poor Law was regarded as a catastrophe not only by the agricultural labourers and the handloom workers; it also badly affected the factory workers. With the economic depression of 1837, it became the main source of discontent. 1,137,000 people in England and Wales received poor relief in 1839. The economic crisis hit not only the workers but also the lower middle class. Savings were lost, bankruptcies became the order of the day, and large sections of the petty-bourgeoisie were pushed down the social ladder. Richard Oastler and Joseph Rayner Stephens, who called themselves Tories, campaigned against child labour and for factory legislation. And for this very reason, they were greatly admired by the industrial workers in the North, who flocked to hear them.

The lower classes, at the time, were in an indignant and angry mood, and ready to receive a new leadership. The

publication of the People's Charter by the London Working Men's Association on May 8, 1838 gave the signal for a giant mass movement. It heralded the entry in politics of a new class. The Charter speedily became a symbol cherished and longed for by the vast majority of working men. The Chartist Movement, as A. Wilson says :

> was an epoch-making stage in British political radicalism during which the working-class took over the reigns of leadership from the middle-class reformers and radicals and conducted a movement which left an indelible impression on both the governing and governed, raising the question of the condition of the people as the most important of public matters. 11

All other working-class organisations while remaining as tributaries, poured their support into the main stream of the Chartist Movement. William Lovett, a cabinet maker by trade, was the Secretary of the L.W.M.A. and author of the People's Charter. He was a courageous and fearless defender of the rights of the people, but his outlook was rather limited by his artisan background. O'Brien, who wanted radical political reform as well as fundamental social change, added his efforts to those of Lovett and his group. As an enormously effective speaker, he set out to arm the Movement with a positive social

11. A. Wilson, "Chartism", in Popular Movement, ed. J.T. Ward, Macmillan, 1970, p. 117.

and political programme. For his intellectual efforts he was dubbed 'The Chartist Schoolmaster'. George Julian Harney, son of a sailor, was imprisoned three times for selling Hetherington's unstamped periodical, The Poor Man's Guardian. He became an ardent revolutionary and stood on the left of the Movement. He founded the London Democratic Association, whose programme included such demands as the eight-hour working day for adults, prohibition of all child labour, the repeal of the New Poor Law, factory legislation, complete liberty of the press, and general school education. In O'Connor, the Movement found its most influential leader. He had previously sat in Parliament and, after establishing ties with radical circles in London, moved to Leeds, in the industrial North, where he launched The Northern Star in November 1837.

The Chartist Movement consisted of two main groups : the artisans of the L.W.M.A., led by Lovett, Hetherington and Cleave, and the unskilled but more militant workers, with O'Connor, Taylor, M'Douall and Harney assuming leadership. Lovett and his supporters were opposed to the use of violence, while O'Connor's repeated slogan was : 'the Charter, peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must'. For this reason historians refer to the former group as the 'moral force'

wing of the movement and the latter as its 'physical force' wing. However, all Chartists were agreed on the importance of the six points, (Universal Manhood suffrage; Annual Parliaments; Vote by Secret Ballot; Payment of Members of Parliament; Abolition of Property Qualification; Equal Electoral Districts), which gave clear expression to the gropings of the people towards democracy. To the working people, the victory of the Charter meant the end of oppression and exploitation.

The Chartists unsuccessfully submitted three Petitions to Parliament in 1839, 1842 and 1848; all of which were disdainfully dismissed by the ruling classes. The Plan of action was based on organising mass meetings and demonstrations and sending petitions to Parliament. In the decade between 1839 and 1848, the existing system was shaken to the roots and the national mood was one of ruthless uncertainty. Monster meetings were held in Glasgow, Newcastle, Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford, Sheffield, Bristol, and London. Torch-light meetings and processions were organised in evenings, especially in Bolton, Bradford, Rochdale, Oldham and South Wales. The participants acclaimed the Charter, signed the petition, and elected delegates to the Convention.

The delegates to the first National Convention of 1839 came from all parts of the country, bringing with them the hope and blessings of the people. The opening of the Convention was a tremendous popular event. It was regarded as the People's Parliament vis-à-vis the House of Commons.

However, differences broke out between the members of the Convention over the question of the use of force in case of the rejection of the National Petition by Parliament. The question opened up one of the bitterest controversies which plagued the Chartist Movement throughout its history. The Birmingham radical middle-class delegates withdrew from the Convention. Afterwards, events moved faster. When the Convention, was moved to Birmingham, great excitement reigned in the city. In the evening of July 4, a peaceful meeting of Chartists in the Bull Ring was savagely attacked by the London police, imported for the occasion. The Convention then passed a resolution condemning the Birmingham authorities. As a result, Lovett and Collins were arrested and later sentenced to one year imprisonment.

When the National Petition was rejected by Parliament on July 12, 1839, the workers were exasperated and for several days there were running battles between the

police and the supporters of the Charter in Birmingham. In South Wales and Lancaster the workers called for immediate action. They began purchasing arms to train and drill. John Frost, who had been mayor of Newport and Justice of Peace, led the workers in South Wales in an unsuccessful uprising in November 1839. The government promptly clamped down upon the agitating workmen and hundreds of Chartists, along with their leaders, were put behind the bars.

In prison and outside of it, several leaders of the Chartist Movement devised their respective plans. Lovett and Collins put forward a scheme for an educational organisation. O'Brien concentrated on the electoral field and the necessity of politically educating the workers. O'Connor felt the importance of the press and worked out a scheme for a daily paper. Vincent advocated tectotalism and came out with a plan for a total abstinence movement. But the need of setting up a centralised leadership for the Movement became paramount. Consequently, the National Charter Association was founded in July 1840. Its proclaimed aim was to implement the People's Charter and obtain a full representation of the entire people in the House of Commons. As soon as he was freed in August 1841, O'Connor, along with other leaders, worked indefatigably to build up the new organisation and a

second National Petition was decided upon.

At that time, the economic situation in the country was moving from bad to worse. Wages were reduced while prices steadily rose. In England ans Wales, nearly one million and a half were unemployed. The work-houses were crowded with paupers. The trade unions turned political and supported the National Charter Association. The following verses from a Hymn, sung at the Democratic Chapel in Nottingham, reflect the sentiments of the workers at the time :

> The seasons toll at Thy command
> And plenty crowns the soil,
> But Avarice spreads his grasping hand,
> And mocks our fruitless toil.
>
> Abundance in a flowing tide,
> Fills all the realm with good.
> But Labour's share is seized by pride,
> And Labour pines for food. 12

When the collection of signatures for the Petition was completed, it was submitted to the House of Commons in May 1842. But its fate was not better than that of the 1839 Petition.

Meanwhile, a sense of unrest ran throughout the country. In Lancashire and Yorkshire, in the Potteries and

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12. Quoted by James Epstein in The Chartist Experience, Macmillan, 1982, p. 253.

Staffordshire, and in Scotland, the unemployed came out in mass processions. In August 1842, large numbers of textile workers and coal miners ceased to work and marched on other factories pulling the plugs out to ensure their stoppage. The movement was gradually developing into a General Strike. In huge popular meetings, it was decided not to resume work until 'the Charter became the law of the land'. But the National Charter Association was rather slow in its response to what was going on among the masses. The strike was thus doomed to failure, for it lacked a central leading organisation. There were also no funds to sustain the strikers in their efforts to implement their demands. After the depletion of their limited resources, the workers began to drift back to work. The Chartist Movement, whose fortunes had received a tremendous boost by the support of the trade unions, consequently suffered from the defeat and almost all the Chartist leaders were arrested.

Having failed to secure the aims of the Movement, O'Connor began to think of utopian schemes and put forward his Land Plan, which aimed at buying up pieces of land and dividing them among the workers. At first the workers responded favourably to the Plan. But soon diffulties arose and the whole enterprise was declared illegal.

The Chartist Movement, which had been declining since the end of 1842, began to revive again in the second half of 1846. The deep economic crisis, which once more threw its dark shadow on the country, created a general feeling of unrest and excitement. Enthusiasm for the Charter was also re-awakened during the election campaign conducted by the Chartists in 1847. O'Connor, who stood for Nottingham, was the first and only Chartist elected to Parliament. In both Europe and Ireland, a revolutionary situation was developing and the February Revolution in France was enthusiastically welcomed by the Chartists.

Against this background, a Chartist Convention met in London on April 4, 1848 to present the third petition to Parliament. It decided to hold a demonstration to march from Kennington Common to the Houses of Parliament on April 10. The Government immediately banned the march and took extraordinary measures to meet the Chartist threat. Tens of thousands of special constables were enrolled. The old Duke of Wellington was summoned to head the troops posted on the occasion to defend London. By taking the initiative from the beginning, the Government succeeded in securing their aim and the Convention decided to abandon the march. In the months which followed the Kennington Common meeting, an armed rising

was talked of and groups of workers began to arm and drill. The Government resorted to the use of violent reprisals. Troops were mobilized and Chartist meetings brutally broken up. As a result of anger, distress and political frustration, violent outbursts took place among the workers in London, South Lancashire and North Cheshire in the summer of 1848. Police spies, such as Thomas Powell and George Davis, had their share in these events; they even sold guns to militant workers in London.

The Chartist Movement was again defeated but Chartism did not collapse into insignificance. By the early '50s O'Connor was no longer the unquestioned chief of the Movement. Some of the former leaders had given up the struggle but the National Charter Association was given a new lease of life by the efforts of men like Harney and Ernest Jones. The Chartist Convention of 1851 adopted for the first time a comprehensive working-class programme, which embraced political social and economic demands reflecting the interests not only of the workers but also of the handicraftsmen, agricultural labourers and small shopkeepers. However, despite the heroic sacrifices of the remnants of Chartism, the Movement was dwindling in number and force and could only muster a few thousands to its support. It grew weaker and weaker but

lingered on till the end of the decade.

The *Chartists failed to achieve their immediate aims* and could not get the Six Points implemented. Nevertheless, the Movement left its imprint on the politics, economics and literature of the period. Politically, it drove all propertied classes and their political parties, Tories, Whigs and Radicals, to combine against the growing strength of the working class. Economically, it played a direct role in putting pressure on the Government to pass the Ten Hours Bill in 1847, and an indirect one in the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Socially, it forced the 'Three Bashaws of Somerset House' to relax their rigid conditions for offering relief to the poor. It also deepened the class consciousness of the workers and showed them the way forward. Julius West rightly observes that :

> Judged by its crop of statutes and statues, Chartism was a failure. Judged by its essential and generally overlooked purpose, Chartism was a success. 13

13. Julius West : A History of the Chartist Movement, London, Constable, 1920, pp. 294-95.

CHAPTER II

Chartists Patted and Combatted

The Chartist Movement had its inerasable impact on English literature. Contemporary writers and novelists could not ignore the Movement and its significance. Literature, especially after 1832, had increasingly become social in outlook. "The Chartist Movement" says Kovalev, "enriched English literature with new themes, broadened its framework, and drew the attention of writers to those sides of the people's life which until then had for the most part remained in the shade".[1] Several writers, belonging to different social classes, became aware of the anomalies of modern life and the miserable conditions under which the agricultural labourers and the industrial workers lived. The humanitarian and reformist themes grew to an unprecedented degree of importance during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Hundreds of literary works in verse, fiction and drama poured out of the pens of tens of writers. In the field of poetry, one comes across relatively obscure names like those of James White, Eliza Cook, F.H. Doyle, Mrs. Norton and Mrs Ellis, who employ the technique of juxtaposed tableaux or pictures of the poor and the rich to

1. Y.V. Kovalev, Op. Cit., p. 120.

bring out effectively the disparity of social classes. Tennyson, in "Locksley Hall" and Maud, Browning, through Italian scenes in Sordello and Pippa Passes, and Mrs Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in "The Cry of the Human" and Aurora Leigh, reflect the concern of the age with the contemporary social unrest. In fiction, Harriet Martineau, in A Manchester Strike, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, in William Langshawe depict a picture of the miserable conditions prevalent at the time in the industrial areas while anathematising trade unions as works of the devil. In this connection, one can also point out several of Dickens's novels, such as Oliver Twist, The Old Curiosity Shop, Dombey and Son, Bleak House and Hard Times, Charlotte Bronte's Shirley and Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South and Ruth, to mention but a few of the well-known works dealing with different aspects of the social ferment. However, all these literary works do not fall within the scope of this study which is concerned mainly with those works written either by non-working-class writers about Chartism and Chartists or by the Chartists themselves about the Movement and aspects of the contemporary social scene.

One of the important writers, who early realized

the explosive nature of the social situation, was Thomas Carlyle (1795-1891), the most influential essay-writer in the first half of the Victorian period. The essays and books that brought him fame include "Signs of the Times" (1829), Sartor Resartus (1831-34), The French Revolution (1837), Chartism (1839), and Past and Present (1843). His radical as well as conservative views can be found side by side in these books, but the radical tone, in almost all of them, is the stronger one. In "Signs of the Times", he pours his anger on the new mechanical age and the increasing gulf between the rich and the poor. In Chartism, he draws a grim picture of the condition of the working class at the time. His attack, in Past and Present, is directed at the laissez-faire doctrine, the money-worship, dilettentism, the Corn Laws, the lamentable condition of the Church and the Chancery, and which demanded state-intervention in factories and 'fair day's wages for fair day's work'.

It was mainly because of his socio-economic views that Carlyle came to be highly respected by his contemporaries. He was looked upon as a new prophet and a master-mind. The 'Condition-of-England' question and the split of the one nation into two, rich and poor, attracted the notice of novelists like Disraeli, Mrs Gaskell and Kingsley.

Carlyle's influence on Dickens is clearly discernible in The Chimes, Hard Times and A Tale of Two Cities. Ruskin professed himself Carlyle's disciple. But with the publication of his notorious Latter-Day Pamphlets, Carlyle, as Dr. William Oddie says in his book, Dickens and Carlyle (1972), "signed the death-warrant of his popularity". His prestige, as a result, began to diminish.

The miserable condition of the workers, the dangerous side-effects of the introduction of machines, laissez-faire and the widening gulf between classes, the aristocracy and its role, and the importance of education were among the questions that repeatedly forced themselves upon Carlyle and engaged his attention. He was one of the foremost and most forceful thinkers of his time to foresee the calamitous consequences of the dismal social setting. His impressive and effective style immediately arrested the reader's attention and imparts a peculiar urgency to the message. In the opening paragraph of Chartism, he writes :

> A feeling very generally exists that the condition and disposition of the Working Classes is a rather ominous matter at present; that something ought to be said, something ought to be done, in regard to it. And surely, at an epoch of history when the 'National Petition' carts itself in wagons along the streets, and is presented 'bound with iron hoops, four men bearing it' to a Reformed House of Commons;

> and Chartism numbered by the million and half, taking nothing by its iron-hooped Petition, breaks into brickbats, cheap pikes, and even into sputterings of conflagration, such very general feeling cannot be considered unnatural! 2

The passage reveals the writer's uneasiness over the political developments in Britain since the publication of the Charter in 1838, particularly the National Petition submitted by the Chartists to Parliament and the Newport uprising in November 1839. He dramatically and passionately appeals to the public, in general, and the authorities, in particular, to do something before it is too late. He draws an alarming picture of the situation and emphatically warns the ruling classes of the impending social catastrophes as a result of neglecting their duties towards the people.

He dubs his times mechanical and in Chartism he refers, as he had done before in "Signs of the Times", to the apparent dangers of the machine and their effect on working men :

> The huge demon of Mechanism smokes and thunders, panting at his great task, in all sections of English land; changing his shape like a very Proteus, and infallibly at every change of shape, oversetting whole multitudes of workmen, and as if with the waving of his shadow

2. Carlyle, Chartism, Chapman and Hall, London,(n.d.), p. 1.

> from afar, hurling them as under, this
> way and that, in their crowded march
> and course of work of traffic; so that
> the wisest no longer knows his whereabout.[3]

Carlyle subscribes to the view that industrialisation led to unemployment and that education, instruction and religion had been turned into mechanical institutions. In other words, he was aware of the dehumanizing effect of the machine.

The Chartists stressed the importance of education and within a short time of the publication of the Charter, several Chartist papers were issued with the view of arming working men with serious, advanced and sophisticated ideas to combat their class opponents. Carlyle's writings, too, reflect his awareness of the need to educate all classes. While some of his contemporaries were talking about education for the middle class, he defended the right of all, high and low, in education. He believed that the heaviest wrong under the sun was to keep the people illiterate. In Chartism, he writes : "To impart the gift of thinking to those who cannot think, and yet who could in that case think : this, one would imagine, was the first function a government had to set about discharging ".[4]

For the deteriorating conditions of the poor,

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3. Ibid., p. 21.
4. Ibid., p. 59.

Carlyle also puts the blame on the laissez-faire doctrine. While middle-class economists and theoreticians at the time were strongly opposed to the idea of state-intervention, Carlyle, alongwith the Chartists and others, was crusading against such ideas. A government based on the principle of 'Let Alone', he believed, was no longer possible in those days in Britain. Laissez-faire, he rightly says, is an abdication on the part of the governors and an admission that they cannot govern. In the same book, Chartism, he makes a horseman tell his horses, when the summer work is done, that he has no work for them and that they are free to seek employment and food somewhere else in Europe, Asia, Africa or America. Elaborating his views in Past and Present, he continues his diatribe against the contemporary society and says : 'Laissez-faire, Supply-and-demand, ——one begins to be weary of all that. Leave all to egoism, to ravenous greed of money, of pleasure, of applause; it is the Gospel of Despair!"[5] In glaring contrast to the 'cash nexus' ethos, he puts full emphasis on the idea that human relationships are far more precious.

Lazy governments, according to him, were mean and had to be done away with. He sided with those who demanded government intervention and new legislations, especially in

5. Past and Present, Chapman and Hall, London, (n.d.), p.214.

the fields of health and education. The gulf between classes, he maintained, was widening and the poor were driven to extremities. Infanticide was committed by parents hard pressed by the times. In stockport, Carlyle mentions in Past and Present, a married couple poisoned their three babies in order to get money from a burial society.

However, his views on aristocracy and democracy widenly diverged from those of the Chartists. His writings reveal his faith in a revival of the old noble traditions among the aristocracy. He wanted them to work hard. Work, he believed, creates hope and idleness leads to despair. Carlyle, too, proved to be a deadly foe to the democratic demands of the Chartist Movement. In spite of all his defence of the lower classes, the sage of Chelsea did not see democracy as the proper way to alleviate their sufferings. In Chartism, he attacked the extension of the suffrage, and like some other reformers, he was only terrified at the prospect of a collective uprising of the people. On democracy he wrote :

> Democracy, we are well aware, what is called 'self-government' of the multitude by the multitude, is in words the thing everwhere passionately clamoured for at present. Democracy makes rapid progress in these latter times, and evermore rapid, in a perilous, accelerating ratio; towards democracy,

> and that only, the progress of things is everywhere tending as to the final goal and winning post. So think, so clamour the multitudes everywhere. And yet all men may see, whose sight is good for much, that in democracy can lie no finality; that with the completest winning of democracy there is nothing yet won, —— except emptiness, and the free chance to win! Democracy is, by the nature of it, a self-cancelling business, and gives in the long-run a net result of zero. 6

This paragraph reveals both Carlyle's shrewdness and his aversion to the masses of the people. His attitude towards the working classes was a mixture of sympathy for the justice of their cause and hostility to their democratic rights.

Mrs Gaskell's, in essence, was not much different. But while Carlyle's approach was paternalistic, Mrs. Gaskell's version of Christianity made her commitment to the workers much deeper and her approach more sympathetic and understanding. In the Preface to Mary Barton she says :

> It is enough to say, that this belief of the injustice and unkindness which they endure from their fellow-creatures, taints what might be resignation to God's will, and turns it to revenge in too many of the poor uneducated factory workers at Manchester. 7

In 1832, she had been living in Manchester, the

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6. Chartism, op.cit, p. 33.
7. Mary Barton, The Works of Mrs Gaskell, Vol. I, London, 1925, Preface, pp. Lxxiii-Lxxiv.

industrial capital of the north, since her marriage with William Gaskell, the junior minister of the Unitarian Cross Street Chapel. Her father, William Stevenson, had been a Unitarian minister for some time. This legacy of Unitarianism undoubtedly influenced her social outlook. The Unitarians believed in the humanity of Christ, and many of them were political radicals and social reformers. But the Chruch of England, looked upon them as Jacobins and infidels and accused them of teaching principles which had produced the French Revolution. Mrs Gaskell's friends included wealthy Unitarian manufacturers as well as inmates of workhouses and prisons. Unlike Disraeli and Kingsley, she was well acquainted with the life of the people she was writing about. She came in close contact with poverty and crime, and considered the latter as the natural result of the former. As a minister's wife she took an active part in fighting social crises to alleviate the misery of the down-trodden. She ran a ragged school in her house and visited factories and mills. She regarded Manchester as the mixed blessing of the industrial revolution. While detesting the smoke and dirt of the city she was proud of its people.

Mary Barton, Mrs Gaskell's first novel, was published in 1848, ten years after the launching of the Charter. The novel, despite the hesitancy and peevishness

of its author, is an outright condemnation of capitalism and its social class structure. In it, as in many other nineteenth century novels, one feels the suppressed indignation and sadness of the humanist in the presence of suffering humanity. Mainly because of the character of the Chartist John Barton, Mary Barton is considered the best among the social-problem novels. Mrs Gaskell identified herself with John Barton and, in his portrait, gave utterance to the workers' agony.

In John Barton of the first half of the novel, human dignity assumes greater dimensions, and he is described through small acts and gestures which make him deeply human. His life is portrayed as a series of misfortunes and bitter struggles, not against blind fate or the unknown as in some of Thomas Hardy's novels, but against concrete social injustices and the economic system prevalent at the time. Since his childhood, he had experienced hunger, which he came to be accustomed to as to an unwelcome visitor. His life, like that of all other working-class families, fluctuates between relative prosperity when trade is good, and starvation when an economic crisis sets in and unemployment becomes widespread. Sometimes he is able to afford the luxury of inviting several friends to a cup of

tea at his home; but at other times he is so plagued with financial difficulties that he cannot even call in a doctor to attend to his dying son.

What makes Barton an impressive character is the way Mrs Gaskell presents him and depicts his development. He is so richly and convincingly drawn that he dwarfs all other characters in the 'condition-of-England' novels. His hospitality in the tea party, in chapter two, vividly brings out this aspect of his character. There, he is happy playing host to his friends and tries to extend his warmth of feeling to as many people as possible. It is such a scene that shows Mrs Gaskell at her best, for it brings out her deep appreciation of the simple life of the poor.

Unlike Disraeli and Kingsley or Ernest Jones and Thomas Martin Wheeler, Mrs Gaskell had no political axe to grind: she was not committed to any political party or movement. This is clearly seen in her impartial treatment of her hero in the first half of the novel. In this connection, A. Pollard says :

> It was, however, a lesson in sympathy rather than in political economy that Mrs Gaskell wanted to teach. 8

Like many other Chartist leaders and members of

8. A. Pollard : Mrs Gaskell : Novelist and Biographer, Manchester U.P., 1965, p. 41.

the Movement in real life, John Barton, who stands for the intelligent operatives produced by the industrial revolution, had his eyes opened by the acute economic and social problems inflicted upon the working class as a result of the economic depression which set in at the end of the 1830s and during the '40s.

Class consciousness is a product of one's own practical experiences, of one's readings, or of both. In the former case, it almost always takes a deeper root than in the second, although it is usually less articulate. To read about a certain incident is quite different from experiencing it. John Barton's case is of the latter kind. Unlike Stephen Morley, the intellectual journalist in Sybil, Mrs Gaskell's hero acquires political consciousness through bitter experiences. In the first chapter of Mary Barton, he expresses his belief in the impassable gulf between the rich and the poor. The rich man's religion, he says, is all falseness and humbug. John Barton is instinctively aware of the fact that labour is the sole source of wealth. Unlike Stephen Blackpool in Hard Times, whose catch-phrase is 'Aw a muddle', he eloquently describes the relationship between the employers and the employed :

> We are their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows; and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus, with a great gulf betwixt us ... 9

Such conceptions were widely held among the Chartists and working-class people, and Mrs Gaskell, here, is only voicing them through her hero.

John Barton's class consciousness is formed through the experiences he undergoes. The court where he lives displays to the world the poverty of the Manchester operatives. It needed no effort on his part to compare Mr. Carson's richly furnished house to the damp muddy cellar where the Davenports have to live in order to arouse his disgust at class distinctions and make him long for their abolition. While working in factories, Barton was a witness to accidents which claimed the lives of several workers or irredeemably maimed them. His friend's wife, Mrs Wilson, 'cotched' her side against a wheel and has never been a strong woman since. When he comes across a report on accidents, while in an infirmary, he immediately recognizes its truth. And when he reads an article in the Northern Star, O'Connor's Chartist paper, demanding shorter hours of labour, he whole-heatedly

9. Op. Cit., p. 8.

supports it.

After the death of his wife, Barton becomes increasingly concerned with the welfare of his class. His episode with the Davenports refutes Mrs. Gaskell's contention that he became more isolated from his fellow workers and neighbours. Having become a Chartist, John works diligently to understand the system and defend the interests of his class. When Carson's mill is burnt down, he immediately foresees the consequences. The workers will be thrown out of work while the owner, having insured his mill, will get enough financial compensation to rebuild it and have its old machines replaced by new and more technically advanced ones. The system works out to the advantage of the employer and the disadvantage of the worker; the rich get richer and the poor poorer.

As a reward for his class integrity and personal sincerity and nobility, Barton is elected a delegate to the Chartist convention of 1839, which submitted a national petition to Parliament, demanding the implementation of the People's Charter. Mrs Gaskell, as a shrewd artist, does not indulge herself in describing pure political meetings. She convincingly conveys to her readers her hero's capability

to represent the people and their love for him through toned-down scenes and small personal gestures, as when people gather in Barton's home on the eve of his departure to London.

The portrait of John Barton shows with whom Mrs Gaskell's sympathies rested. She was not only endowed with deep psychological insight; she was so possessed with his character that she could register all his feelings and thoughts. The way she describes his reaction to his appointment as a Chartist delegate reveals her art and psychological perception:

> He would have been ashamed to own the flutter of spirits his appointment gave him. There was the childish delight of seeing London — that went a little way, and but a little way. There was the vain idea of speaking out his notions before so many grand folk — that went a little further; and last, there was the really pure gladness of heart arising from the idea that he was one of those chosen to be instruments in making known the distresses of the people, and consequently in procuring them some grand relief, by means of which they should never suffer want or care any more. 10

Her leanings towards the working class are reinforced by John Barton's satirical account of the fashionable company proceeding to the Queen's palace. Such a description deepens the reader's indignation and reflects the contemporary

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10. Ibid., p. 96.

widespread unfavourable reactions to those royal functions.

In London, Barton's hopes and those of the working people are dashed to pieces. His disappointing experience in the capital comes as an anti-climax to the much cherished hopes. Again Mrs Gaskell cleverly lets Barton describe the streets of London, but when he is asked about their main business as Chartist delegates, he is unwilling to talk of their humiliation. For him, it is mentally, emotionally and psychologically unbearable to go into details. He briefly says :

> I cannot tell of our down-casting as a piece of London news. As long as I live, our rejection of that day will abide in my heart; and as long as I live I shall curse them as so cruelly refused to hear us; but I'll not speak of it no more. 11

The feelings of deep disappointment and frustration that were widespread among the Chartists and workmen each time their petitions were forthrightly rejected by Parliament in 1839, 1842 and 1848, come out strongly and effectively in this passage.

Because of their activities, trade unionists at the time were often refused work and persecuted as in the

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11. Ibid., p. 115.

case of the G.N.C.T.U. (1834), the Tolpuddle martyrs (1834), and the Glasgow Cotton spinners (1837). In the novel, John Barton, as a result of his trade-union and Chartist activities, is made redundant. His life is increasingly embittered by his circumstances. He sees his class subjected to the worst kind of exploitation, and when they complained they were rudely and humilitatingly treated.

In the second half of the novel Mrs Gaskell uses the murder of young Carson as an excuse to drop John Barton as her hero. The latter's noble struggle is abruptly dismissed. Chartism and the conditions of the working class are suddenly forgotten. The remarkable artistry of the earlier part is lost under the impact of the silly sentimentality of the latter. The whole episode of the chastened John Barton and Mr Carson, senior, is dictated by the author's belief in Christian forgivenss and peaceful cooperation between social classes. The implications of Barton's life and actions became too much for Mrs Gaskell and she could not sustain her artistic honesty for long. She found herself in a dilemma. She had either to uphold her Christian principles and ditch her hero, or to endorse the idea of class struggle and conclude her novel accordingly. Instead of regarding John Barton's understanding as being

promoted and deepened by the experiences he undergoes, she considers them as causes of his mental deterioration. Thus the protagonist is sacrificed by his creator on the altar of her Christian conceptions.

Mrs. Gaskell's failure to achieve her aim in Mary Barton can also be partly attributed to the debacle of the Chartist demonstration on April 10, 1848. The defeat of the Chartists in real life made novelists and writers, other than those firmly committed to the working class, think that the contemporary social system was naturally ordained and sanctioned by metaphysical powers. Towards the end of the novel, the reader is made to understand, in the dialogue between Carson and Job Legh, that what John Barton had been suffering from was the 'seeming' injustice of the inequalities of fortune, and not an actual one. Instead of providing adequate answers to the problems raised in the first part of the novel, Mrs Gaskell concludes by transferring all her surviving characters to a new land — an escapist denouement.

In writing Mary Barton Mrs Gaskell was seeking solace and comfort after her deprivation of her ten-month old son who died of scarlet fever. Disraeli's aim was different; he was out to conquer political power. Born into

a middle-class family of Jewish origin, he coveted a place among his country's aristocracy. After a brief flirtation with radicalism, he was elected to Parliament as the Tory member for Maidstone in 1837. In 1841, Disraeli was refused office by Peel. Afterwards he turned his back upon his chief and rebelled against the Tory leadership. He gathered around himself, a group of young men who dreamt of regenerating the Tory party and giving it a new lease of life. The Young Englanders viewed the past with admiration and thought of resurrecting it. Humiliated by the defeats incurred on their class by the rising bourgeoisie, sections of the aristocracy sought refuge in an imaginary happy past with a medieval order. They opposed liberalism and proposed a return to feudal life. Their ideas obviously found an echo in Carlyle's Past and Present. The movement was also an emotional revulsion against utilitarianism, and its members were vehement opponents of industrialisation. Under the leadership of an illusory reformed aristocracy, they preached a political alliance between the Nobility and the People. Such ideas constituted the essence of Disraeli's ideology which induced him to embark on the task of writing his trilogy : Coningsby (1844), Sybil (1845) and Tancred (1847).

During the 'forties, the country was running into

difficulties. The economic depression, which had started in 1837, showed no real signs of being over. In 1842, Chartist activities were in full swing and the Movement reached its highest peak. Strikes erupted in several countries and factories were brought to a standstill and closed down. The middle-class Anti-Corn Law League was pressing its demands for free trade. Any rebel, honest or otherwise, was presented with a chance to have a go at the government. Disraeli seized upon it and his criticism of Peel grew harsher and harsher. He wanted to diffuse his views among as many people as possible. The Novel, as a literary form, was becoming popular and its readers were on the increase. Disraeli decided to make use of it and resumed novel writing to reach a wider audience.[12] The propagandist strain in his novels is so pronounced that D. Cecil feels obliged to remark that

> Disraeli's novels, for all their brilliance, are not strictly speaking novels. They are not, that is, meant to be realistic pictures of life, but discussions on political and religious questions put into fictional form.[13]

After giving expression to his political views in Coningsby,

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12. In the Preface to the fifth edition of Coningsby, Disraeli says :
> It was not originally the intention of the writer to adopt the form of fiction as the instrument to scatter his suggestions, but after reflection, he resolved to avail himself of a method which, in the temper of the times, offered the best chance of influencing opinion.

13. D. Cecil : Early Victorian Novelists, London, 1964, p.220.

he turned to the social problems and dwelt upon them in Sybil.

The latter gives a panoramic view of the English society at the time, but the picture, though accurate, is superficial. The writer did not intimately know the life led by many of his characters nor shared their feelings. He collected his material form reports of the Royal Parliamentary Commissions, and while touring the North in 1844 on a prolonged visit to some of his aristocratic friends. It is obvious that Disraeli, unlike Mrs Gaskell, was not emotionally involved in the theme of his novel. One feels that the author was surveying his society with the cold-bloodedness of the politician who only wanted to capitalize on existing problems. The main theme in Sybil is the wide gulf separating the poor from the rich and the means to bridge it. The solution offered by Disraeli reveals his way of thinking and the kind of political jugglery he was involved in. On the face of it, he seems to be saying that the aristocracy should reform and unite with the toiling masses. But it turns out to be, as Raymond Williams says, a recommendation for uniting the agricultural and industrial interests. Despite his pretension to the contrary, Disraeli was insincere in defending the cause of the poor. In Jazamian's words : "All the evidence suggests

that ambition and self-interest were the guiding lights when Disraeli took decisions".[14]

Disraeli's portrait of the rich, in Sybil, is full of criticism of that class composed mainly of merchants, Nabobs and West India planters, who plundered other countries, or descendants of servile servants of Henry VIII who robbed the monasteries of their riches. But none of these aristocratic characters is infused with life or comes naturally to one's mind, with the exception perhaps of Sir Vavasour Firebrance and his Lady. Sir Vavasour's only concern in life is the claims of the baronetcy and the means of achieving them. His wife is also fond of political gossiping and intriguing.

In Sybil, too, there is indeed no dearth of factual information about social conditions in early Victorian England. Disraeli's novel is stuffed with descriptions of life in agricultural Marney, where a labourer's earnings amount to eight shillings a week and ricks are put to fire, and in industrial Mowbray with its smoke, dirt and poverty, where handloom weavers are starving and Chartism is making converts. Yet, compared to Mary Barton, Sybil is found extremely faulty as a work of

14. L. Cazamian : The Social Novel in England 1830-50, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 179.

art. Mrs Gaskell is generally successful in engaging her reader's symmathies, which Disraeli singularly fails to arouse. As an illustration, one can point out the scene in the Davenports' cellar and contrast it with that in Warner's room. The reader gets emotionally moved at John Barton's attempts to feed the baby and restore the fainting mother to consciousness. On the other hand, one is not, in the least, impressed by Warner's silly muttering : "I loved my loom and my loom loved me".[15] The former scene also forms an integral part of the novel and cannot easily be detached from it while the latter is unimpressive and inserted for documentary purposes.

Disraeli wrote Sybil mainly to prove that the people's grievances could be overcome, not through actions undertaken by the people themselves, but through benevolent measures carried out by a reformed aristocracy. To prove this hypothesis the author set out to disparage the activities of the Chartists and trade unionists and show their futility. The course of events in the novel is charted in accordance with these conceptions.

'Moral force' Chartism is represented in the book by Stephen Morley, who is shot dead at the end while trying

15. Sybil, London, 1900, p. 133.

to obtain the documents which establish Sybil's rights and prove her aristocratic origin. Throughout the book, Morley and Egremont are contrasted with each other. If Sybil is looked upon as a symbol for Britain, the novel can be interpreted in terms of a struggle between Young England, represented by Egremont, on the one hand, and Morley's Chartism on the other. Both men court and try to win over the lovely bride. As for the struggle between them, Disraeli had no doubt about its outcome; he had made up his mind about it before starting on his book. Young England or Egremont must win and the novel tries to show how it is done.

Readers of the novel are told that Stephen is a workman and the son of a workman; however, he is not depicted as such. He is always portrayed as a highly intellectual and articulate person. He is often referred to as the editor of the Newbray Phalanx. His radicalism is revealed in his disparagement of the idea of Home and in favouring that of Community. Society, he rightly asserts, cannot be renovated through individual efforts but by reconstructing it on new bases. Devilsdust, despite his differences with Morley, has a high regard for him. He tells Dick, his friend and neophyte,

> "If you come to the depth of a question, there's nothing like Stephen Morley. 'Twould take six clergymen any day to settle him. He knows the principles of society by heart". 16

As one of the two Newbray delegates to the Chartist Convention of 1839, Stephen takes part in contacting M.Ps. When engaged in highly intellectual arguments with some of the nobility he admirably stands his ground. Though a Chartist, he, like Bronterre O'Brien in real life, is aware of the shortcomings of the Charter and that it cannot be the panacea for all social evils.

Disraeli's attempt to disparage Stephen's character is unconvincing. Stephen, according to his creator, turns out to be a spy and informs the police of the secret meeting-place of the Convention. His love for Sybil induces him, against his own principles, to take part in the 1842 riots, leading to his death.

Gerard, Sybil's father and an overseer at Trafford's factory, is another Chartist character in the novel. Like Stephen, he is very much concerned about the conditions of the people. He has deep religious feelings and is always yearning for the past. His views are best summed up in the following quotation, in which he shares his view of England with Egremont

16. Ibid., pp. 249-50.

> "There is more serfdom in England now than at any time since the Conquest. I speak of what passes under my daily eyes when I say, that those who labour can as little choose or change their masters now, as when they were born thralls". 17

To get the Charter accepted and implemented as the law of the land, Gerard is ready to use violent as well as peaceful means. But, like John Barton, he comes to realize the futility of such means and renounces his adherence to the Chartist cause. His moral courage comes out on two prominent occasions : first, when he refuses to surrender his post as leader of the remnants of the Chartist Convention in London, despite all dangers; second, when he faces the rioters who come to burn down Trafford's factory.

Devilsdust is Disraeli's specimen of 'physical force' Chartists. Though an orphan with no known parentage, Devilsdust manages to survive and make his way in the world. At five, he gets a job at a textile factory, becomes a first-rate workman and, later on, a prominent member of the Mold Court Literary and Scientific Institute in Mowbray. Unlike his frivolous friend, Mick Radley, he is serious, ambitious and full of thoughts. Demoralized by his inhumane circumstances and aware of the misery of his class, he commits

17. Ibid., p. 198.

himself to the task of alleviating their pain. [illegible] influence of Stephen Morley, Devil Dust also [illegible] joining the Total Abstinence Society. He drinks [illegible] but it is the more dangerous for that. He once told [illegible] that since his childhood he has been [illegible] to toil while others drink their port wine and [illegible] legs on Turkish carpets. He is also a member of a secret trade union and active in recruiting members. Sometimes he or his creator in other words, sounds socialist. His statements seem to have been taken down from a book, as when he tells Nick and the girls, "Labour may be weak, but capital is weaker. Their capital is all paper."[18] This is typical of Ellis his shrewdness; nevertheless, it, like several other things in the book, lacks the throb of life

Devildust aspires to be a leader of the people and shrewdly watches events. He can arrive at the right [illegible] by observing small, but significant, things. [illegible] workman is always thinking how to strike terror into the hearts of capitalists. Although he is a great admirer of Morley, he is aware of the weaknesses of [illegible] theory. To Chaffing Jack and Nick Morley, he remarks:

> "I never heard that moral force won the battle of Waterloo. I would try moral force a little, and see whether it would keep the thing going. [illegible]

18. Ibid., p. 116.

> the Capitalists will give us their red-coats, I would be a moral force man to-morrow". 19

In this and similar touches, Disraeli had been trying to give the 'physical force' Chartists their due respect as sincere, shrewd and courageous men. But the overall impression deduced from Disraeli's gallery of working-class characters is certainly unfavourable. 'Bishop' Hatton is depicted as savage, Nick Radley trivial, Devilsdust dangerous, Stephen Morley dishonest. As for Gerard, he is after all of aristocratic origins. The Chartist Movement is seen as little more than sordid assemblies of angry and largely illiterate men. The Chartist Convention is, as Sybil finds out, "a plebeian senate of wild ambitions and sinister and selfish ends, ..."[20]

If Mary Barton suffers because of the two main plots it consists of, Sybil can hardly be said to have organic unity. It includes a series of tableaux which are not very well connected. Some of them are rather good and arouse interest, but they are mere sketches. The tommy-shop, Mrs Carey and Dandy Mick, The Temple of the Muses, Chaffing Jack telling Gerard and Morley about Hatton, the miners and Wodgate are examples which could be mentioned in

19. Ibid., p. 413.
20. Ibid., p. 336.

this respect. The overall impression, however, is that the novel is a collection of medley pictures. It is pastiche.

Both Disraeli and Kingsley have several points of similarity with each other. While the former used the novel as a vehicle to warn his profligate aristocracy of the dangers surrounding them, the latter's main concern was to try and revive the missionary zeal of the Church of England to combat evils as well as the atheistic tendencies of the age. Both writers came under the influence of Carlyle and both held almost identical views. If the Young England group had not been broken up in 1846, Kingsley might have allied himself with it, for he was very much close to its spirit. As the Young England leader called upon the aristocracy to reform, 'Parson Lot' struggled for a reformed Church of England. Both were aware of the upheavals of the time and worked hard to avoid any revolutionary change.

The Christian Socialists, one of whom was Kingsley, were originally a group of religious people, who, like the Evangelicals and Tractarians, were appalled by the corruption and spiritual poverty of the Church of England. F.D. Maurice was the most prominent theologian of the group. He aimed at reforming the Church and restoring her declining influence which she was fast losing ground. Around him gathered a group of clergymen and young lawyers. Maurice advocated the

idea that human society is one body, whose head is Christ. He also repudiated competition as a constant source of suffering for mankind and considered cooperation and brotherhood as essential things. But the body, he said, needed a head or an authority to be duly obeyed. Consequently he accepted class society and class distinctions.

Kingsley, who was rector of Eversley at the time, reverently followed Maurice and adopted his ideas. Between 1848 and 1852 he was active in the Christian Socialist Movement. He never really trusted the workers' movement and was suspicious of trade unions. His aim, like that of his colleagues, was to unite the workers with the Church and the gentry. To Politics For the People, the Christian Socialist organ, he contributed three important letters. The tone of the paper, on the whole, was one of moderation. It continually warned the workers against the use of violence or hasty action. In his three letters to the Chartists, he followed the same pattern as he did in the placard to the 'Workmen of England'. He usually started with a vigorous denunciation of the shameful conditions under which the poor lived and ended with a plea for moral amelioration before the introduction of political reform. The fact that he wrote the placard is in itself indicative of his interest in

the Chartist Movement. It is also said that Kingsley once "stood up in a Chartist meeting and began a speech : 'I.am a Church of England parson and a Chartist'.[21]

Stimulated by the 1848 events, Kingsley resorted to fiction to give expression to his ideas. In Yeast (1848), he dwelt upon the conditions of the agricultural labourers, with whom he was well acquainted through his parish work. He then thought of writing another novel dealing with the problems of town workers. Alton Locke, his next novel, was based, to some extent, on the life of Thomas Cooper, the Chartist, whom Kingsley was in correspondence with at the time.[22]

Alton Locke was written between February 1849 and August 1850. Like Mary Barton and Sybil, the novel critically portrays the circumstances which prevailed in the 'hungry forties' and drove many workers to join the ranks of Chartism, and how these men came to realize their mistake and repented. For that very reason Cooper's life and experiences provided Kingsley with a very convenient vehicle for the achievement of his aim. Kingsley did not know much

21. S.E. Baldwin : Charles Kingsley, Cornell U.P., 1934, p. 10.
22. See L. Cazamian : Kingsley et Thomas Cooper : Etude Sur Une Source d' Alton Locke, Paris, 1903.

about the life of the working class in towns and, instinctively, went to Cooper as a rich source for the knowledge he lacked. The hero, like Cooper, is a worker, a Chartist and a poet. There are several similarities between the two, but Kingsley could not minutely follow Cooper's life because it would have easily been perceived. It would also have been a story of a real historical figure, not a work of fiction.

The novel's greatest vitality lies in the early chapters which deal with Alton's childhood in a Dissenting home and describe the making of his mind. Born in a London working-class suburb, he is brought up a sickly, degenerate Cockney. Young Alton, like Thomas Cooper, loses his father. In the vivid portrait of the mother as well as in that of Mr. Higginton, Kingsley, reveals his animosity to the Dissenters and expresses his belief that their rigidness unwittingly encouraged atheism.

At the age of fifteen, young Alton is apprenticed to be a tailor. Labour conditions in the tailoring trade were so distressing and hard to bear. In 1849, the English reading public were startled and shocked by a series of articles written about "London Labour and the London Poor" by Henry Mayhew and published in the Morning Chronicle. Some

of them described the abominable conditions to which tailors were subjected by the sweating system. 'Parson Lot', under the influence of these articles, felt the urge to write his pamphlet, Cheap Clothes and Nasty. In his pamphlet, Kingsley movingly depicts the living conditions endured by the tailors who were virtually the slaves of middle-men. These facts, too, find their echo in the novel. The horrible conditions in the shop to which Alton is sent are so unbearable that on his first day, he recoils with disgust. For twelve hours a day he has to work with sickly, drinking men in a stifling room. A chattering young tailor tells the new apprentice about the cellar and the three floors the shop is composed of :

> "Cellar workroom we calls Rheumatic Ward, because of the damp. Ground-floor's Fever Ward — them as don't get tyfus gets dysentery, and them as don't get dysentery gets tyfus — your nose'd tell ye why if you opened the back windy. First floor's Ashmy Ward — don't you hear 'em now through the cracks in the boards, a sniffling away like a nest of young locomotives? And this here most august and upper-crust cockloft is the Consumptive Hospital". 23

One of the few moving scenes in the novel is when Sandy Mackaye, an old Scotsman who keeps a bookshop and is a fictitious portrait of Carlyle, takes Alton for a walk to

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23. Alton Locke, Macmillan & Co., 1879, p. 24.

Clare Market and St. Giles, where they pay a visit to three young sempstresses and an old woman. In a corner of an attic room a sick girl is lying upon a few rags on the floor. The wages of the other two girls are too little to meet their needs and those of the sick girl and her old mother. They are faced with the grim choice : either to die of starvation or to go on the streets and prostitute themselves. It is a realistic episode which could have been more effective had it not been for the self-pity of Ellen, the sick girl, and which turns it into a rather melodramatic scene. It also reminds one of two other scenes similar to it : the Davenports' cellar visited by John Barton and George Wilson, and Warner's room as seen by Sybil, Father St. Lys and Egremont. Mrs Gaskell's portraiture successfully enlists the readers' feelings, while Disraeli's is remote. If Mary Barton, Sybil and Alton Locke are to be judged by the artistic quality of each of these scenes, there is no doubt that the first will hold its place while Sybil will tail the list.

Another lurid scene in Alton Locke is that in which the hero reluctantly accompanies Downes to Jacob's Island.[24] Thrust into a room where rats can be seen running about,

24. It is interesting to mention, in this connection, that Dickens's description of Jacob's Island in Oliver Twist (1837-38) had made the district infamous, but little was done to change conditions there and that, in 1850, Dickens was accused of being unrealistic by Alderman Cute who went too far and asserted that Jacob's Island did not exist and had never existed.

Alton describes the keen physical horror he witnesses:

> A low lean-to with wooden walls, without a single article of furniture; and through the broad chinks of the floor shone up as it were ugly glaring eyes, staring at us. They were the reflexions of the rushlight in the sewer below. The stench was frightful — the air heavy with pestilence. The first breath I drew made my heart sink, and my stomach turn. But I forgot everything in the object which lay before me, as Downes tore a half finished coat off three corpses laid side by side on the bare floor. 25

It is a hair-raising scene whose bitterness and repugnance cannot be found anywhere else in the social-problem novel.

Through his own experiences and under the influence of both Mackaye and Crossthwaite, Alton's class consciousness is deepened and his solidarity with his own class promoted, despite an ambitious undercurrent which urges him to climb the social ladder, join the rich man's club and marry the beautiful Lillian, the dean's daughter. Crossthwaite tells young Alton of the Charter and infuses his enthusiasm to wrench the rights of the people from the ruling classes. Infected with his friend's fighting spirit, Alton becomes a Chartist. He voluntarily undertakes a Chartist mission to an impoverished rural area. Here Kingsley feels at home, for, as rector of Eversley, he knew the misfortunes of the

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25. Alton Locke, p. 370.

agricultural labourers at first hand. His symmathy for them is reflected in the rather detailed account of their hardships in the speeches preceding the riot. Carried away and deeply touched by what he has been listening to, Alton delivers a strongly-worded speech. The strong and effective language used by Alton denotes Kingsley's deep concern for the poor. However, he immediately restrains his protagonist and starts describing the scene of the riot in a tone of scornful derision paving the way for the savage onslaught of the forces of law and order on the hungry peasants.

Like Thomas Cooper in real life when he made several speeches in the Potteries on his way to Manchester in 1842, and Felix Holt in the novel bearing his name, Alton is arrested, put on trial for sedition and arson and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. On his release from gaol he is chastened and purged of his extremism. Recovering from brain fever, he is made ready to receive his salvation at the hands of Eleanor, who stands for Christian Socialism and appears in his dreams as a combination of mother and madonna.

As Ethel Remage points out, there are several elements of similarity between Sybil and Alton Locke. Disraeli's arraignment of the 'truck' system forced upon the

miners is matched by Kingsley's sweaters' den. In throwing in his lot with radicals the Chartist, in each novel, has to choose between the 'physical' and the 'moral force' wing of Chartism. Crossthwaite and Mackaye in Alton Locke correspond to Gerard and Morley in Sybil. The Chartist press is represented by Morley's The Nowbray Phalanx in the one and by O'Flynn's Weekly Warwhoop in the other. In each novel the Chartist Movement is faced with a major crisis, serving as the turning point in the structure of the plot. The strike of 1842 has its effect on the fortunes of Sybil, Gerard and Morley. Similarly, Crossthwaite, Alton and Mackaye are profoundly affected by the Chartist demonstration of April 10, 1848. Sybil is disillusioned by the London Convention; so is Alton disgusted with the cowardice of the Chartist leadership shown on Kennington Common. Gerard in Sybil and Alton in Alton Locke end by renouncing the cause of the people and denying their earlier visions.

Towards the end of the novel, and in the literary sense, Alton's character disintegrates and his personality does not hold. In the final chapters, he loses his intellectual power and is portrayed as a passive receiver of religious lessons. Of the earlier Alton there is nothing left. The change in his character reflects the uneasy

transition in Kingsley's social philosophy. After drawing a sympathetic portrait of a working class Chartist, the author, as Mrs Gaskell has done before, withdraws his sympathy from his hero and condemns his action. On Kingsley and his novel, George J. Holyoake, in his book Bygones Worth Remembering, wrote :

> There is noble sympathy with labour, and there are passages which should always be read with honour in "Alton Locke". But the book is written in derision of Chartism and liberal politics. Alton Locke himself was like his creator. Kingsley's acts were the acts of a friend, his arguments the arguments of an enemy; and Alton Locke, despite the noble personal qualities with which he is endowed, was a confused political traitor, who bartered the Kingdom of Man for the Kingdom of Heaven, when he might have stood by both. 26

The authors of Chartism, Mary Barton, Sybil and Alton Locke belonged to the middle and upper classes, and their writings were marred with their political and ideological prejudices. They forthrightly reject the ideas of class conflict and class struggle, and this is reflected in their attitude towards Chartism. They, on the whole, express their sympathy for the workers who bore the brunt of social change. Carlyle was at one with the Chartists in denouncing

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26. G.J. Holyoake : Bygones Worth Remembering, London, 1905, Vol. I, p. 90.

the dehumanizing effect of the machine which also led to widespread unemployment. He defended the workers' right to be educated. The laissez-faire doctrine and the 'cash nexus' ethos he strongly condemned. In their place, he stressed the need for state intervention and upheld the idea of the necessity of human relationships between social classes. The portraits of John Barton, Gerard, Morley and Devilsdust, and Alton Locke and Crossthwaite reveal, in general, the humanitarian attitude held by their creators towards the workers and the Chartists.

However, with the exception of Mrs. Gaskell, these writers did not really know the working class. They hated violence and were ignorant of the new way of life coming into existence. In writing their books and novels, their main purpose was to show the futility of Chartism and of political action. They aimed at appeasing the workers and making them more patient and contented. Social regeneration, they wanted to say, should be preceded by moral transformation. Whoever resisted this conception, had to be abandoned and anathematized, as in the case of John Barton. All these writers in fact were terrified by the Chartist Movement and the revolutionary prospects it raised.

CHAPTER III

Chartist Fiction, or Militancy Frustrated

There was another group of writers who, unlike Carlyle, Mrs Gaskell, Disraeli and Kingsley, believed in the doctrine of class conflict and class struggle, and wrote accordingly. It included, among others, Thomas Martin Wheeler, Ernest Jones, Thomas Frost and Thomas Cooper. They all belonged, at one time or another, to the Chartist Movement and were committed in much of their writings to a working-class point of view.

Very few critical books dealing with Chartist writers have so far been published.[1] Among them is Y.V. Kovalev's valuable book, An Anthology of Chartist Literature, in which he points out that the study of Chartist literature is further complicated by the fact that :

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1. Among these are : R.J. Conklin's Thomas Cooper, the Chartist (1935), John Saville's introduction to his Ernest Jones, Chartist (1952); Y.V. Kovalev's introduction to his An Anthology of Chartist Literature (1956), and Martha Vicinus's The Industrial Muse (1974), in which she devotes a whole chapter to the discussion of Chartist literature. In addition, there is a number of unpublished Ph.D. and D. Litt. theses dealing with aspects of Chartist literature, such as : Ethel Ramage, "Chartism in English literature, 1839-76", University of Wisconsin, 1939; Bickner Trawick, "The Works of Gerald Massey", Harvard University, 1942; R.C. Sharma, "A Critical Study of Nineteenth-Century Radical Poetry (With Special Reference to the Chartist Poets)", Agra University, India, 1980.

> The main nucleus of the literary legacy of Chartism is contained in the works of working-class poets who signed their poems with pseudonyms and initials or did not sign them at all ... During recent years it has been possible to trace the owners of some of these pseudonyms and initials. It has become known, for instance, that Linton, Lassey, and O'Connor signed their works with the pseudonyms Spartacus, Bandiera, Ferrigenus, respectively, and that John Watkins and Samuel Lyld were concealed behind the initials J.W. and S. However, the majority of pseudonyms and initials remain unsolved to this day, just as the names of the writers of the unsigned works are still unknown. 2

The Chartists deeply believed in the importance of literature, in general, and poetry, in particular. Politics, to them, formed an integral part of literary writing. Their literature rested upon the radical tradition as found in Milton, Godwin, Paine, Shelley and Byron — writers who sympathised with the common people and upheld their cause against the aristocracy. Burns was regarded as the champion of the poor and advocate of equality. They were also captivated by the novels of Dickens and Thackeray. But the former was preferred to the latter, for his outspoken sentiments on behalf of the lower orders of society. They firmly believed as Ernest Jones puts it, that "Literature is the exponent of the spirit of the age, it is this, or it is

2. Y.V. Kovalev, Op. Cit., p. 121.

nothing".[3] Their classical attitude towards literature finds expression in an article by Jones in which he says : "Few attain the height of combining the Beautiful with the useful, and thus giving either a power which neither could attain alone".[4] It is clearly a reiteration of the famous Horation dictum. Their ideals ran high, but unfortunately most of their literary output could not attain the height of Parnassus. Their style was marred by a declamatory tone and high-sounding word, and their seriousness, for the most part, unrelieved.

From among a host of Chartist fiction writings, two novels — Sunshine and Shadow (1849-50) by Thomas Martin Wheeler and De Brassier : The History of A Democratic Movement (1851-52) by Ernest Jones — stand out.

Wheeler's novel, like Jones's De Brassier, was written after the defeat of 1848 when the Movement reached a serious impasse and its advanced cadres were impelled to analyse more carefully the existing social forces and find out the weakness of the Chartist organisation. In his novel, Jones concentrates on the role of class enemies within the movement while Wheeler's reveals the inadequacy of the

3. Ernest Jones, "Literary Review"; quoted in Kovalev's Anthology, Moscow, 1956, p. 312.
4. Ibid., "Poems by T. Powell", p. 310.

Chartist leadership at moments of crisis. Wheeler himself was one of the Chartist leaders and a staunch supporter of Feargus O'Connor. At the time of writing Sunshine and Shadow, the author was living at O'Connorville, one of the colonies established by the Chartist Land Company, where he had a two acre allotment.

Wheeler was born in a working-class family and his father was a wheelright as well as a licensed victualler. At seven he was sent to a school at Walton-le-Dale, near Preston, and from there to another at stoke Newington where he remained until he was fourteen. In the opening chapter of his novel he describes this school, its pupils, and its master and mistress. Shortly after, he was apprenticed to his uncle in the haberdashery business. With his uncle and aunt the apprentice was not happy. He soon left them and went to Reading to learn the baking business. After working for a Mr Shepherd in Soho Square, London, Wheeler made a tour on foot through Kent and the Southern counties, visiting Canterbury, Dover and other towns on the south coast. It was followed by another tour to the North and the Midlands. In the course of these ramblings he gained much information about the people and their conditions. After his return to

to London, he gave up baking and worked as a gardener. He began to cultivate his mind diligently and write poetry. His enthusiasm for Chartism induced him to rewrite popular songs and adapt them to Chartist principles. At twenty-eight he was thrown into the society of some Owenites who advised him to open a school and run it. From that date, it can be said, his political career began.

His School was subsequently changed into a social Institution with a comprehensive programme on socialism, science, dancing, music and public discussions. For some time, both Owenities and Chartists held their meetings in his schoolroom in Kensington, but eventually differences surfaced and Wheeler sided with the Chartists. In 1840 he was appointed the London correspondent of the Northern Star. As the representative for Kensington he took part in the National Charter Association in 1840 and 1841. On the latter occasion he was elected a member of the permanent Executive. He also attended the National Convention of 1842 and, after the arrest of Campbell, the General Secretary, was voted into his place. In 1843 he assisted O'Connor in devising his Land Plan and, as his biographer William Stevens says, "took more interest in its organisation and progress than any other

person connected with the scheme, and the gigantic dimensions it ultimately attained, may, with truth, be attributed to Wheeler's unceasing energy as the first secretary".[5]

In 1846 he was one of the Leicester delegates to the Leeds Conference and survived an attack on him by Thomas Cooper who accused him of inefficiency. He also was present at the National Convention of 1848 and took an active part in organizing the demonstration on Kennington Common. In 1851 he was once more returned to the Chartist Convention on behalf of Exeter and Tiverton. But differences with Ernest Jones led to his eventual retirement from politics, except for a short comeback in 1858. For some time he worked as the metropolitan manager of the British Industry Association, a life-insurance society. He then devoted his time to promoting the activities of the Friend-in-Need Society until his death, early in 1862.

Wheeler's novel was serialized in the Northern Star, between March 1849 and January 1850. The tale is largely based on his own life-story and its hero, Arthur Morton is made to go through experiences similar to those which befell the author during his Chartist days. Realizing the

5. William Stevens, The Life of Thomas Martin Wheeler, John Bedford Leno, 1862, p. 26.

influential role of literature, Wheeler, in his introduction to the novel, called on his fellow-Chartists not to abandon the field of literature to their middle-class rivals, and underlines the didactic nature of his novel :

> The fiction department of literature has hitherto been neglected by the scribes of our body, and the opponents of our principles have been allowed to wield the power of imagination over the youth of our party, without any effort on our part to occupy this wide and fruitful plain. Would that some of the many talented minds acknowledging our tenets, would achieve that supremacy in the novel which Thomas Cooper has done in the epic. To stimulate them to the effort is the object of this attempt. 6

The novel falls into two parts. The first, and the aesthetically weaker of the two, introduces the reader to two school-fellows and friends, Arthur Morton, who comes from a working-class family, and Walter North, the son of a shrewd wine merchant. It depicts Arthur's involvement in Chartist activities, his arrest, escape and emigration to America. His chance meeting, on board the "Esmeralda", with a married woman, the sister of his boyhood friend, with its fatal result, is also covered in this part. Part Two tells of Arthur's return to Britain and further contrasts Walter North's career with that of Arthur. The former gets married into the

6. Sunshine and Shadow, in the Northern Star, 31 March 1849.

aristocracy while the latter's wife, Mary, is only a working-class woman. Unemployment throws a dark shadow over Arthur's matrimonial life and drives him, in a fit of despair, to assault and rob a gentleman, who turns out to be his old friend. With the improvement of trade, the protagonist gets a job and resumes his political activities. In the aftermath of the 1848 events, Arthur Morton escapes to the Continent to avoid arrest and incarceration, while his wife and daughter patiently await his return.

In contrast with non-working-class writers, Wheeler makes his belief in class struggle pervade the whole of his novel. This is clearly reflected in the discussion of Chartist politics between Arthur and Julia, Walter's sister. When the latter says that the interests of the middle and working classes are similar, Wheeler's hero sets about to expound his views, stresses the irreconcilability of interests and exposes the conflict inherent in their relations :

> the interest of the working man is to sell his labour at the most profitable rate; the interest of the other is to reduce it down to starvation point : the one is benefited by the whole of his order being well employed and well paid; the object of the other is, by the introduction of machinery, and the encouragement of pauper immigration to the large towns, to cause a redundancy of labour in the market, that he may work upon the

> fears of the sensitive and weak, and purchase their labour at his own price. 7

The passage reflects the class consciousness and solidarity of the speaker but it also reveals his, and the novelist's hostility towards industrialization.

Throughout the novel Arthur and Walter are flatly and naively contrasted. The former is portrayed as humble, shy, diffident and moody: the latter proud, self-confident and ambitious. Young Arthur is apprenticed to a printer and leads, as a working man, a hard and intolerable life. His middle-class counterpart, on the contrary, inherits his father's shop as well as the latter's greed for acquiring wealth, regardless of principles. He becomes a prosperous merchant through cheating his customers and adulterating, undetected, his goods. The working-class hero is shown as honest, sincere and idealistic. He joins the Chartist movement and is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of his class. Unlike him, Walter is unashamedly selfish and egoistic. He cogitates about the future and plans his sister's marriage with Sir Jasper Baldwin, the newly-appointed governor of the Windward Islands. Through this match, Walter hopes to promote his own matrimonial chances to marry into the

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7. Ibid., 30 June 1849.

aristocracy. But his scheme is almost foiled by his sister's persistence in refusing to get married to a man who is double her age. In an incredible episode, which is burdened with Wheeler's deep rooted aversion to the middle and upper classes and simultaneously shows his ignorance of them, Walter tricks his sister into marrying Sir Jasper by arranging for him to go into Julia's bedroom while she is asleep.[1] It is a contrived incident which is meant to expose the villainy of Walter and Sir Jasper, and contrast it with Arthur's purity.

Like Alton Locke, Arthur, while attending one of the public meetings in the Bull Ring, is so carried away by the other speakers that he delivers a fiery speech in which he pours forth his pent-up feelings. Consequently, violence breaks out despite the leaders' attempt to calm down the audience. The incident is followed by Arthur's arrest and accusation of arson, but he manages to escape. This part of the story is similar to Alton's adventure in Cambridgeshire. But while Kingsley lays bare the misery and hunger which drive the agricultural labourers to loot the Hall farm, and unwittingly manages to enlist the reader's sympathy for the rioters before he condemns their action, Wheeler is pitifully concerned with his hero's eloquence - a thing that defuses his scene and deprives it of any emotional involvement on

the part of the reader.

In discussing the main Chartist events of 1839, 1842 and 1848, the novelist is unsuccessful in integrating them into his narrative. The narrative voice of the author obtrusively intervenes to tell, for instance, about the National Convention of 1839 and how the delegates were divided while the ordinary workers united in their adherence to the Charter. In his criticism of the Convention, the writer includes both the 'physical force' party, for their wild 'ardour, and the 'moral force' party, for their cupidity and selfishness. With the advent of the 1848 events, the author's voice once more projects itself to analyse what happened :

> the National Convention met, ... its small voice, ... had neither the war tones of Revolution, nor yet the gentle accents of Peace, Law, and Order; composed of two distinct elements, those of war and peace, which it vainly endeavoured to amalgamate; it was powerless for either, and thus served only to irritate the public mind,...[8]

Wheeler's novel has the merit of presenting a portrait, however brief, of Mary Graham, one of the women agitators in the female activists in the early Victorian Social novel. Unlike the ethereal Sybil, Mary is more realistically portrayed. She actively participates in the

8. Ibid., 15 December, 1849.

political movement and addresses public meetings. It is in one of these meetings that Arthur's attention is drawn to her. Yet, she is regrettably depicted, after her marriage, living in the shadow of her husband. However, this is probably a true expression of the level of women's participation in those turbulent years. Mrs Dorothy Thompson, who underlines the important role of woman in the early years of Chartism, (1838-1843), tells us :

> From some time around the middle of the forties women seem to become less prominent in Chartist demonstrations and organisations. Although there were women's localities of the National Charter Association, and women members of ordinary localities, the number of purely female radical and democratic societies declined dramatically. So also did the participation of women in demonstrations and outdoor meetings. 9

Aesthetically, the best part of the novel is that in which the protagonist loses his job and a dark shadow falls upon the two lovers. They sell their furniture, move from one abode to another, their first-born dies, and Mary goes out to do some washing and needle-work to earn a few pence for their living. Like other working-class people of of independent character, such as John Barton, Arthur finds it humiliating to live on another's earnings, even if it

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9. Dorothy Thompson, The Chartists, Temple Smith, London, 1984, p. 122.

were his wife's. With psychological insight, the artist draws a picture of the morose and depressed Arthur, who silently broods over his blighted life :

> Had he been alone in the world he could have battled with poverty, or if the struggle became too painful he could easily have withdrawn from the conflict, but his wife and children now bound him to life, he had their lives and welfare to protect, with the maddening knowledge that he was unable to perform it, — that he was a drag upon his wife's energies, a recipient of the infinitesimal sum that is doled out to the poor sempstress, and to reflect upon it was to endanger the sanity of his intellect. Misery had set her mark upon him — the terrible struggles of his mind were visible in his features — his former acquaintance would not have recognised him, in the emanciated and haggard-eye shadow that might occasionally be seen wandering through the streets of the metropolis, seeking bread but finding none; exploring, with ardent gaze, the very pavement of the streets in the vain hope of finding something ... 10

When Arthur assaults a gentleman and robs him of his money, the author, like all overtly didactic novelists, interrupts his narrative to dwell upon crime and its motive, and finds its source in the unequal distribution of wealth. He also shows how poverty adversely affects lovers. Mary and Arthur, in the course of facing the harsh realities of life, shed off their romantic idealism and no longer see each other

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10. Op. Cit., 27 October, 1849.

as perfect human beings.

Wheeler's style is eloquent but often shows traces of affectation in the course of the novel. This is how the writer describes Walter's sister :

> Julia, at the time our story commences, was in her fifteenth year — mild and docile as a pet lamb, yet with as laughing an eye as ever sparkled in the giddiest of her sex, beaming resplendent in love but flashing disdainful in ire; seldom, indeed, were glances of the latter seen, but, when fully aroused, there was a depth of feeling and an energy of expression in that usually retired and modest maid, which astonished those unacquainted with the varying characteristics of human nature. 11

Wheeler's aim in writing the novel was to defend the Chartist Movement and refurbish its image which had been tarnished by its opponents as well as by non-working-class writers. He therefore portrays his hero pure, honest and idealistic, and contrasts him favourably with Walter and Sir Jasper who represent the middle and upper classes respectively. Wheeler, unlike Ernest Jones, did not really know those two classes, and the part of the novel dealing with their representatives suffers from his failure to see the complexity of human nature, even in members of the propertied classes. In his delineation of Arthur's character,

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11. Ibid., 14 April 1849.

the author tries to draw a round figure by showing him in his public and private life, in his romantic love for Julia and his mature relationship with Mary, and in his attitude towards the latter in relatively prosperous times and in times of harship and destitution. However, despite all efforts, his hero's character remains flat and aesthetically poor. It is mainly because Wheeler, in conceiving his novel, put too much emphasis on the political theme to the detriment of the artistic structure. Arthur is originally devised so as to convey a political message and vindicate the Chartist Movement. He lacks vitality because he is made the mouthpiece of a political idea thinly disguised.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Novel had become the major and most popular literary form. Its readers, at the time, had enormously increased their numbers among all classes. Writers, thinkers, reformers and even religious leaders from all shades of life came to realize the importance of the novel not only as a means of entertainment but as a literary vehicle to convey a certain message — be it social, political, religious or otherwise — so that converts to the cause could be made. Dickens, Thackeray, Mrs Gaskell and Bulwer Lytton — among others — dwell upon the social scene and dress their social reforming ideas, with

different degrees of success, in the garb of fiction. Cardinal Newman and Charles Kingsley expound their religious views in the novel form. Disraeli and Wheeler, as it has been pointed out before, resort to fiction to try and give their political views wider currency. In his novels, Ernest Jones toys with the same idea and tries to drive a similar lesson home. In his preface to De Brassier, he conspicuously brings his aim into focus :

> I do not see why Truth should always be dressed in a stern and repulsive garb. The more attractive you can make her, the more easily she can progress. Let the same moral be conveyed in a tale, and preached in a sermon, the former will make ten proselytes, when the latter will secure but one.
> Therefore, instead of writing a dry analysis of the causes why democracy has so often been foiled, instead of reasoning over the inconceivable follies that have characterized almost every democratic movement, believing example to be better than precept, I have embodied those causes, and developed their effects in a tale, every political feature of which is founded on fact, and where fiction does no more than frame the historical picture. 12

Unlike the simple plot of Sunshine and Shadow, De Brassier's is unusually complicated. The main plot is concerned with the demagogic leadership of Simon De Brassier who, to smite the aristocracy, stormly leads a democratic

12. De Brassier, in Notes to the People, 1851-52, Vol.I, P.20.

movement and cunningly sells the popular cause not to the government but to himself. His devilish ways are quite clear in his device of creating unrest among the people and in his motives to serve his own interests. The demagogue secretly intrigues with Bludore, a money-lender and stock exchange broker. The two intriguers buy shares in turbulent times when their value falls and sell them when popular agitation subsides due to De Brassier's failure of leadership, and the market gets steady. In this mischievous and diabolic way, they make profit and accumulate wealth at the expense both of the stability of the aristocratic government, shaken by public disturbance, and of the people who shed their blood, offer unlimited sacrifices and, in the event, get transported for life or imprisoned for an indefinite number of years.

Integrated with the main plot are four sub-plots. The first charts out the blighted career of Charles Dalton, an upright workman turned poacher and anarchist with the harsh treatment he receives at the hands of society. In the second Maline, otherwise Lucy, seduced and discarded by the decrepit Walter De Brassier, elder brother of Simon and representative of the decaying and corrupt landowners, takes her revenge on him in a melodramatic way by putting his house

on fire and burning him alive with it. The other two sub-plots deal with Edward's love for Agnes who is infatuated with Simon, and Latimer's love for Adeline, daughter of Henry Dorville, a manufacturer/banker of the Manchester School. The novel was never completed for Jones's paper collapsed before he was able to finish it. But an ironic note crowns the last published portion. After the defeat of the badly planned insurrection, De Brassier is elected to Parliament and then leaves the country for the Continent, having proved himself "worthy to be a leader of the people".

In his preface to the novel, Jones asserts that his tale contains no personal allusions and says that "no individual in British democracy is represented under a fictitious name".[13] Also in his introduction to Book the Second he emphatically repudiates the suggestion that he represents particular individuals under the various characters included in the novel.[14] However, despite Jones's protests, readers have always felt strongly inclined to read De Brassier as a roman à clef. In inserting his prefatory notes, the writer was in fact anticipating and answering questions raised by contemporary readers. R.G. Gamrage, the

13. Ibid., p. 20.
14. Ibid., p. 833.

first historian of the Chartist Movement, who at the time he was writing his book had severed his connection with the Movement after being at loggerheads with Jones, alleges, to prove the latter's hypocritical attitude towards O'Connor, that De Brassier is a thinly veiled representation of the Chartist leader.[15] Without raising the least doubt about Jones's sincerity and devotion to the cause of the people, one cannot overlook the fact that some characters in the novel are partially based on real people.

In the case of Latimer, for instance, several similarities between him and his creator could be pointed out. Jones's biographers tell us that his father was equerry to the Duke of Cumberland who was later made king of Hanover. His grandfather, on the maternal side, was a landowner in Kent. His wife, *née* Jane Atherley, belonged to an old Cumberland family. After his return to Britain in 1838, Jones's friends and acquaintances included people like Disraeli and the Duke of Beaufort who presented him at court in 1841. Latimer, too, is made the descendant of an ancient family. His friends and colleagues at school and university naturally belonged to the aristocracy. Jones, soon after his release from prison, published an open letter to the Chartists,

15. See Gammage, pp. 361-66. For an interesting discussion of Gammage's allegation, see also John Saville : *Ernest Jones, Chartist*, London, 1952, pp. 251-55.

in the Northern Star, August 10, 1850, in which he discussed the causes of their failure in 1848. One of these causes, he writes, was that the Chartist Assembly of that year quarrelled about men and did not carry out measures.[16] Latimer, in the novel, is shown to stick to the right policy. Denounced and abused by people from within and without the popular movement he joined, "he still looked to measures, not to men".[17] Cut off from his rich family and friends and faced with poverty, the talented Latimer, like Jones, tries his hand at literature. As the author himself was sentenced to two years imprisonment in 1848, so is Latimer after the failure of the insurrection. Latimer's father, because of his son's revolutionary activities, disinherits him. This last incident foretold what came to happen to Jones himself in 1856, when his uncle whose heir-at-law he was, died leaving his entire fortune to his gardener.[18]

Edward, the mechanic, also represents another facet of Jones's personality. He is made to defend some of the ideas and views propagated and agitated for by the Chartist leader. In the Wild Bull, a public house, where crowds of people gather to discuss their democratic rights, the argument soon turns on personalities. Each leader of the movement has his followers who defend him on purely personal

16. Jones's open letter to the Chartists, August 10, 1850, is quoted in John Saville, pp. 109-112.
17. De Brassier, p. 330.
18. Frederick Leary, The Life of Ernest Jones, London, 1937, p. 66.

grounds. The speakers abuse one another and are divided into factions. When such a low ebb in the discussion is reached, it is Edward who exhorts the combatants to stick to measures and not men, echoing, as in the case of Latimer, Jones's own words addressed to his fellow Chartists. In Edward's opposition to the uprising, one is also reminded of Jones's advice to the men of Tower Hamlets in a speech delivered to an open air meeting on Sunday, June 4, 1848, and for which he was arrested, put on trial, and sentenced to two years of solitary confinement. Jones, on that occasion, told his audience :

> Steer clear of all political outbreaks and partial rioting ... That is just what the Government wants. In a riot of that kind (a reference to the riot in Bradford and Manchester at that time) they immediately seize upon the leading men. They will immediately cripple the organisation and your organisation will be thrown back. 19

In the portrait of Lord Weathercock, similarities between him and Lord John Russell could be perceived. The former, in whose mansion a cabinet meeting is held, is described as of small stature. In the following humorous and sarcastic passage, which reflects favourably on Jones's artistic powers, the writer draws a vivid picture of the

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19. Northern Star, June 10, 1848.

host who objects to Sir Gaffer Grim's plan to crush the proletarian movement :

> Lord Weather Cock, however, who turned with every political breeze that blew strong enough to turn his little body, stiffened on the rusty hinge of office, but who was a far-sighted, prudent politician and understood the management of popular movements better than most men —— perhaps from the fact of once having himself been one of their leaders, dissuaded from this course. 20

The role of the Whig leader, who was short in height, in the agitation for the Reform Bill of 1832, is well known. He, too, was the one who introduced the Bill in the House of Commons and vigorously defended it. His popularity, at the time, reached its zenith.

Simon De Brassier, the protagonist, is a demagogue. He joins the democratic movement and immediately becomes its most influential leader, swaying the rank and file with his power of oration, as Feargus O'Connor was and used to do in regard of the Chartist Movement. But the character of De Brassier is not a simple and direct representation of the most popular leader among the Chartists; it is more complicated than that. The aristocratic upstart is the

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20. De Brassier, p. 284.

product of certain circumstances similar to those underwent by Latimer, in the novel, and both Jones and O'Connor in real life, for the latter was also the descendant of a big landowning family in Ireland. The damagogue is referred to as born into "a far-descended, though not a titled family".[21] But being the younger son he is cut off without a shilling. Like Jones and O'Connor, De Brassier is also called to the bar and qualified as a lawyer.

Although penniless, the non-practising lawyer leads a life of profligacy and dissipation and runs into debt. Feeling the gathering storm of revolutionary change, De Brassier writes a letter to the leaders of the aristocratic party offering his services to their cause in order to stem the rising tide of the people. But because of his recklessness, his overtures are declined and turned down. Repulsed by his own class, he, with deceitful intentions, joins the democratic movement and subsequently becomes the worshipped idol of the masses. With some qualification, one can draw a parallel here between De Brassier and Jones, for the latter, as readers are told by George Howell and John Saville, faced serious financial troubles soon after purchasing Kearnsey Abbey, Kent, in the autumn of 1844. Within a few months, that is in

21. Ibid., p. 48.

June 1845, Jones wrote a letter to the Committee of the Anti-Corn Law League, with copies to Bright, Cobden and George Wilson, proposing to start a paper, but the offer was refused. Early in 1846 he joined the Chartist Movement and, in no time, became one of its outstanding leaders. Jones was never a scheming demagogue; his sincerity and steadfastness to the cause of the people was acknowledged by all — his friends and opponents within the movement as well as his class enemies. In his portrayal of the character of De Brassier he was projecting neither himself nor any other Chartist leader, but only availing himself of certain experiences he and others went through.

However, there is no doubt that Jones must have had O'Connor in mind while writing of De Brassier, for throughout the novel there are divers points that summon the ghost of the Chartist leader to one's mind. For instance, De Brassier proclaims a Sacred Holiday of one month and asks the people to work no more until they attain their rights. Acting upon his advice the enormous multitudes attending the rally separate into various divisions, walk upon factories and pull the plugs out to ensure their stoppage. This part of the novel is based on the Plug Strikes of 1842 and O'Connor,

though not the originator of the strike, voted in support of it at the Manchester Convention of that year. In another part of the novel, the novelist makes Lord Weatherrock say of De Brassier, "... he will always hesitate on the brink of action".[22] The correctness of the remark is borne out by subsequent events. O'Connor, too, ever since the fateful gathering at Kennington Common on April 10, 1848, had been accused, by his detractors, of shying away from extreme measures. De Brassier is elected to Parliament for the town of Spindles, so was O'Connor elected for Nottingham in 1847.

All these examples are capped with the striking similarity between the two, which comes out strongly in chapter 23 entitled "The Convention". In it, De Brassier, like O'Connor in 1848, informs the delegates of a warning he received that he would be shot if the agitation is intensified, and that the other leaders are to be arrested and put behind the bars. He also makes an accusation, worded in general terms, that some members of the Convention are spies in the pay of the government —— an accusation which O'Connor made, though in a much milder form. When money stops coming from the country to the assembled, De Brassier steps in and offers them a financial lever out of his own pocket. And historians

22. Ibid., p. 285.

of the Chartist Movement tell of O'Connor offering the profits of the Northern Star to meet the expenses of the Convention members.[23] But De Brassier is depicted, from beginning to end, as a thoroughgoing scoundrel and a money-grabber, which is in direct contrast to the character of the most popular Chartist leader.

Like other literary writers, Jones follows the same technique of comparing and contrasting the rich with the poor, but in a more subtle way than that of Wheeler. The ruling classes are shown as overwhelmingly powerful. They have their spies who keep them informed of the democratic movement, its factions and the bickerings of its leaders. Lord Weathercock and his cabinet are in full control of the internal situation in the country. Except for a few and passing moments of panic, they cold-bloodedly proceed to draw their plans to intimidate the people, arrest their leaders and deal a crushing blow to the movement. Lord Weatherrock's plan differs from that of his colleague, Sir Gaffer Grim, who stands for Sir George Grey, the Home Secretary in 1848, only in tactics and timing. Instead of clamping down on the leaders when popular enthusiasm is running high and the movement united,

23. See Gammage, pp. 314-15; also John Saville, p. 252.

he proposes to wait until the people, intoxicated with their power and initial successes, commit some acts of violence which are sure to estrange some supporters and sympathisers and lead to internal divisions and splits. His plan carries the day and proves the foresight of the shrewd politician.

Henry Dorville, a prototype of Dickens's Gradgrind and Bounderby combined in one, is a prosperous businessman. His example illustrates the success of the middle class as well as their greed. The way he invests his money reflects his acuteness and foresight. Expecting troubles in the manufacturing areas he starts to take precautions. He insures his factories, old machinery, bank, houses and furnitures at double their value. However, greed brings about his death, for as soon as the news of Walter De Brassier's demise reaches him, he cuts short his holidays and leaves for Stanville Hall to salvage as much as he can from the debts the deceased owed him. Thus he falls a victim to the Crowds who burn him alive with his house.

As the upper and middle classes come under attack, so do the clergy, represented by Mr. Pinnafore, the crooked but intelligent rector of Stanville Hall. He is a sycophant who knows how to humour the prematurely aging Walter and his

senior maiden sister, and gain their confidence. Love of trade and profit is in his blood. As the author says, "Christianity was, to him, a bank, and the old maids in the neighbourhood were its clerks".[24] In his sermons he assures his congregation that the way to heaven passes by the Cape of Good Hope. Like Mrs Jellyby in Bleak House, but even worse than her for he cunningly aims at personal gain, the young curate starts a subscription for the purpose of Converting the Kaffirs in Africa. A philanthropic fancy fair is consequently held to promote the same cause. Rustic games precede the opening of the bazar and, in one of the entertaining scenes which is also loaded with sharp social criticism, a gay party sit reclining on the garden terrace of Stanville Hall amusing themselves with the sight of the poor villagers performing their games.

On the other hand, Jones's picture of the people is by no means flattering. They are presented as simple-minded, emotional, hopelessly divided and lacking in foresight, but also capable at certain moments of attaining heroic dimensions. They are easily moved by the noisy clamour and ranting speeches of De Brassier who resorts to harangue and

24. De Brassier, p. 143.

abuse while denouncing the upper classes in order to win over the populace. In his first public appearance he easily, too easily perhaps, manages to overpower them and enlist their support for himself. Commenting on this sudden rise of the demagogue to popularity and the mishandling of the mechanic who wisely tries to admonish the people and put them on their guard, the author unsparingly and scathingly says :

> It is a lamentable thing that the popular element should be so easily impressable [sic] by shew and clamour. The most abusive speaker is too often the most popular — the wise, the really democratic, is too often trampled under foot. The surface gains the day — the core is overlooked. 25

On another occasion, when a one-month strike is proposed, the people blindly pledge their support and refuse to listen to Edward's argument to consider the consequences. The latter, who serves as a foil to De Brassier but seems also to be unwittingly created to have the crowd vent their anger on, is knocked to the ground and trampled upon.

The divers divisions, which were historically prevalent among the Chartists, are cleverly and sarcastically illustrated in the half-comic, half-serious discussions in

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25. Ibid., p. 53.

chapter 5, suitably entitled "The Alembic". The participants quarrel among themselves and get their voices hoarse; each defends a leading figure whom he considers the paragon of democracy. When reproached by Edward for stooping to personal abuse, each starts trying to formulate his opinion. One speaker calls for the nationalisation of land. Another is an advocate of cooperation. A third stresses the importance of education and the moral amelioration of the masses. A fourth speaker supports the use of physical force to put an end to the system. A teetotaller promises his listeners speedy attainment of freedom if they abstain from taking liquors. Priesthood and religion are also attacked. Accusation of deism, materialism and atheism are banded around and the meeting ends in scuffles and proves a fiasco. It is a scene that shows the people and their leaders still helplessly groping in the dark, hoping to hit on the right path.

Jones was aware that large sections of the people were degraded by the harsh treatment meted out to them by society, and that man's character is, to a great extent, moulded by social conditions. Throughout his life he believed that crime and poverty are causally inter-connected;

the one is the outcome of the other. But he also believed that man has to exercise his will to change his life and improve it. This conviction gives rise to his sympathy for and condemnation of Charles Dalton or the Poacher, as he is nicknamed. Henry Dorville and the social system he represents deal harshly with the honest and persevering Dalton. As a result, the latter tries to retaliate and take his revenge on both of them. In times of social unrest he finds his long-awaited opportunity. Like Disraeli's 'Bishop' Hatton and his Hell-cats, the Poacher, with his followers, takes hold of the banker's house, plunders it, gets drunk and maliciously, puts it on fire. The episode is similar to the plundering of the Mowbray Castle in Sybil, but not as graphic.

Hotwing is another character in Jones's novel representing people acting in despair. His comic figure, with his huge sabre sticking every now and then in the pavement, is vividly described and, in artistic merit, comes close to excelling Disraeli's 'Bishop' Hatton on his white mule, brandishing a sword and leading his wild followers to destruction. But Jones's picture is not all sarcasm for it ends on a dignified note, describing the heroic death of Hotwing fighting to the last in a futile attempt to wrench

the people's rights from their class enemies.

Jones is undoubtedly successful in integrating all parts of his novel, despite the complexity of its plot. Simon De Brassier agitates; Dalton seeks to avenge his wrongs mainly on Dorville, his employer, whose daughter is in love with Latimer; Edward pines away after Agnes who silently worships De Brassier; and Walter de Brassier, the elder brother of Simon, invites Maline's revenge through his debauchery and deception. The chain of cause and effect, of ordered and interconnected happenings is capably forged and proves Jones's elaborate craftsmanship.

But the novel's main and damaging weakness lies in its characterization. Except for a few touches, here and there, especially in the characters of Hotwing and Dorville, the characters are on the whole insipid and uninteresting, mere sketches awaiting their full-blown development. Jones's use of reported speech, perhaps, is mainly to blame, for the characters are mostly shown not in action but in the reporting of their activities. Dialogues which, technically speaking, give the reader a first-hand knowledge of the character, are seldom used. With the character of Dorville, as with Hotwing, one's admiration for

Jones's artifice is drawn, but it also arouses one's sense of frustration. The reader realizes that here are the seeds for an artistically admirable character, of the Dickensian type. The following is a description of the banker :

> Dorville was deeply imbued with the doctrines of the Manchester School. A strict man of business, he looked on the world as a counting-house, or a workshop, and everything in his eyes was raw material, machinery, or gold. The rights of man resolved themselves into the course of trade, and he looked down with equal contempt on peers, titles, armies, generals, fame, glory, literature, and art, on the one hand, and on love, friendship, domestic ties, want, disease, and misery on the other. Every thing, with him, was regulated to the laws of demand and supply. Man, with him, was subject indiyidually and collectively to that same law. 26

Symbolism is also used by the writer who, in chapter 13, describes a stream of water which has its pure source in the woods. It runs through Stanville Park, and grows greater but muddier and more polluted while flowing sluggishly through industrial towns. It signifies not only the damaging as well as the revitalizing effects of industrialism on society but also the entire human civilisation in the course of man's history. But the symbol is lamentably made explicit, crude and tenuous. By taking

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26. Ibid., p. 331.

upon himself the task of explaining to the reader the significance of the stream and what it stands for, Jones oversteps the limits of symbolism and robs his symbol of its effectiveness and power.

Claims could also be made for Jones's psychological powers and understanding of the behaviour of crowds. Like all eminent statesmen and leaders of the past, he was an unconscious psychologist possessing an instinctive but sure knowledge of the character of crowds. In his vivid and lively description of the insurrection lies an uncontradicted proof of this assumption. In Book the Second, chapter 3, he tells of how the conspirators start six fires in six different parts of the town. Thus, the curiosity of the working people is aroused. They throw open their windows and doors to get tidings of the progress of fire. Rumours draw them out on the streets and, without the least intention of participating in the insurrection, they find themselves in the midst of it. With masterly touches, the artist draws his picture :

> A busy, anxious, murmuring hum undulated along the immense multitude —rumour after rumour rippled across them like a breeze — and, tossed by vague surmise, doubt, fear, and expectation, the pulse of

> the population kept beating faster, — they became restless, feverish, excited — dangerous — and lightly [sic] to be impelled by any accidental circumstances.[27]

The authorities, too, know how to work upon the people's anger and get them implicated. They intentionally send out small groups of policemen among the crowd, insulting and knocking them down. How the people react is another evidence of Jones's psychological insight as well as his artistic skill :

> The people, guiltless of any outrage, it first submitted, then murmured, then resented, then resisted ... The blood of the mass once roused, to quell it was not easy — the police fought with fury and desperation, but their isolated knots were soon surrounded — passion rose — anger got the mastery — a series of fierce desperate scuffles ensued, — and soon the beaten guardians of peace, lay trampled in their blood, — wondering, when dying, why they had not been supported. 28

The whole chapter, in fact, surpasses, in artistic merit, William Morris's similar description of a successful insurrection in his News From Nowhere (1890). It is also an improvement on a similar episode in The Confessions of A King (1847-48), also by Jones, but written from a different angle. The two are written from one and the same perspective, that of popular democracy. However, the former is primarily

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27. Ibid., p. 855.
28. Ibid., p. 856.

concerned with the movement of the people in the streets; the latter is narrated by a scheming plotter implanted inside a king's palace. It is probably the outcome of a change wrought in the writer himself by years of participation in the Chartist Movement. When he came to write The Confession of A King he was still the young aristocrat newly recruited to the ranks of the people and occupied more with his knowledge of the upper classes. But after his bitter experiences among the Chartists and during his period of harsh incarceration, Jones emerged from his prison newly baptized, with both his feet firmly implanted in the popular movement. The scale was turned and his knowledge of the people, their cause, behaviour and rights predominated his thoughts.

De Brassier, as shown above, is largely based on Jones's personal experiences in the Chartist Movement. Despite glaring weaknesses, it is praiseworthy as a literary work; fine artistic touches are scattered throughout.

The Chartists found in literature an important weapon to combat class enemies. In fiction, they tried to present a new image of themselves, which is radically different from that portrayed by writers from other classes. In the fictional works of Mrs. Gaskell, Disraeli and Kingsley,

they are represented as wild people or, to say the least, extremists who have to be tamed either by the force of law, religion or an enlightened aristocracy, or by all three combined together. Against this misrepresentation, the adherents of the Charter resorted to fiction. They realized the importance of fiction writing and tried their hands at it.

The novels of Thomas Martin Wheeler and Ernest Jones, discussed here, are, probably, the best among plethora of other writings by Chartists.[29] However, they do not gain by comparison with other novels of non-Chartist writers. Sentimentalism, didacticism, contrived incidents, the forced intrusion of the author's narrative voice, and, in the case of Wheeler, a shallow and superficial knowledge of human nature — these are the main weaknesses of the Chartist novel. In terms of characterization, it is also artistically poor. Wheeler's Arthur Morton and Jones's Edward and Latimer remain as flat as ever a character could be. Moreover, Arthur and Edward, although referred to as workers, are never depicted as such. The effect of industrialization on

29. Thomas Frost's The Secret, serialized between 25 May 1850 and 19 October 1850 in the National Instructor, and Thomas Cooper's collection of short stories, entitled Wise Saws and Modern Instances (1845), claim a place among the best.

these characters is non-existent. The portrait of Arthur Morton is, furthermore, marred with Wheeler's attempt at idealizing the Chartists and the workers. But Jones is much more realistic and down to earth. He is aware of the workers' defects and does not mince words while writing of them. In his view, they are too simple, too emotional and easily swayed by demagogues and self-seeking upstarts. But Jones's artistic powers do not find in fiction an easy field to embrace.

The Chartists aimed at abolishing monarchy, radically changing society and extricating men and women from the dark abyss of their life. The charter, to them, was a symbol of the forces of change as well as a device to usher in a new way of life. They looked forward to the day when the millennium could be brought about and people live in harmony with each other. But they also realized the hardships entailed and the obstacles lying in the way. In spite of their failures in the social struggle, Arthur Morton, Edward and Latimer remain adamant and resist adjustment to their society and acquiescence in its faulty rules.

CHAPTER IV

The Purgatory of Suicides : A Vision of the Future

The greatest social event in Britain, during Cooper's life-time, was the Chartist Movement which was the result of the split of the nation into two rival camps : the upper and the lower classes. Thomas Cooper belonged to the latter and throughout his life he remained a passionate advocate of social equality and, even after his withdrawal from the Chartist Movement, strove for the alleviation of the poor's miserable lot. When he came in close contact with the Chartists in Leicester he naturally embraced their ideals, joined their ranks, and soon after became their prominent local leader.

One of the best ways to approach Cooper's poetry is through a consideration of some salient features of his tumultuous and remarkable life. Cooper's Autobiography[1] makes an indelible impression of the efforts made by this diligent autodidact, orphaned at the age of four, to acquire knowledge from several directions. There is no doubt that in his mental development he showed signs of precocity. At Gertrude Arram's school in Gainsborough, where he moved with his widowed mother, he soon became his teacher's favourite scholar. Between 1816 and 1820, he was sent to John Briggs's school where he not only pursued his studies but was also employed by the master as an assistant to teach the younger children.

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1. Thomas Cooper : The Life of Thomas Cooper, Leicester U.P., 1971.

Cooper made use of a Mrs Trevor's circulating library to read a number of plays, romances and novels. Mrs Trevor, too, secretly made available to him new books and periodicals purchased by a group of the gentry who commenced a "Book Society" at her shop. In his thirteenth year Cooper got hold of one of the Cantos of Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and Manfred, which from that time on infused him with an irresistible desire to read poetry. To his boyhood friend, Thomas Miller, he used to rehearse Coleridge's "Christabel" and Burn's "Tom o' Shanter". The ambitious boy also embarked on a rigorous course to teach himself Latin, Hebrew and Greek, in addition to reading religion, history and philosophy books. He also committed to memory poems by Milton and Shakespeare, whose poetry overawed him and made him shrink into insignificance.

After moving to Lincoln in 1833, he joined the Mechanics' Institute where he taught Latin and Greek, and learnt French and Italian. He also studied German. His interest in Music made him join a Choral Society in the city. He then became the correspondent of the Lincoln, Ruthland, and Stamford Mercury. It was in the old Guildhall of Lincoln and while attending a meeting of the town council, that he first conceived the idea of writing a drama or an epic.

From London, where he spent eighteen months in real hardship and dire poverty, he moved to Leicester. There, his radical sentiments prompted him to take up the cause of the starving stockingers and to join the Chartists. Thanks to his eloquence, wide knowledge and energetic nature, he soon became the dynamic leader of the Chartist organisation in the town. To infuse his supporters with knowledge and enthusiasm, he founded a Sunday-school, along the lines of the Methodists, with classes named after some famous freedom-fighters, such as John Milton, John Hampden, William Tell, George Washington, Major Cartwright and William Cobbett.

In 1842, and with the rising misery of the poor, Cooper's speeches grew fiery and fierce. On his way to Manchester to attend the Chartist Convention of that year, he passed through the Potteries and made speeches at Hanley, Fenton, Longton, and Stafford, and called upon the workers to join the general strike and cease their labour until 'the people Charter became the law of the land'. For his role, Cooper was arrested and sentenced to two years' imprisonment, which he spen at Stafford gaol. During the period of his incarceration he composed several of his tales included in his Wise Saws and Modern Instances. He also composed his long-contemplated epic, The Purgatory of Suicides.

The poem comprises ten books or tableaux and opens on the social note which runs throughout and gives it its unity of theme and vision. The first six stanzas, as Cooper mentions in his preface, sum up his speech in Hanley on August 15, 1842, in the course of which he asked the workers to lay down their tools and cease work until the many are no more slaves to the few. They also include a sharp attack on kings, lords and, with an echo from the Bible, wolfish priests disguised as sheep. 'The majesty of ALL' or equality for all is Cooper's ruling passion as depicted in this poem. The search for Love and Truth has its starting point in equality. To gladden Humanity and bring about an earthly paradise or the millennium is a sacred goal to achieve through the levelling out of all, kings and commons, rich and poor, aristocrats and workmen. How to attain knowledge and Wisdom is the subject discussed by the debating spirits of suicide kings, statesmen, philosophers, legislators, bards and lovers, ancient and modern, in a series of dreams. Their rhetorical and, sometimes vehement, arguments on ways and means of overcoming Fear, Hate and Tyranny, and of ushering in the jubilee of Love and Wisdom form part of the torture they undergo in Hades for comitting suicide. Their torture comes to an end only when they realize and acknowledge the importance of equality. At the end, a Festival of Brotherhood is celebrated by the contenders, participating in it on

equal terms. Thrones and ranks are abolished. Pride is done away with. Mammon and Wrong are condemned. Labour and Right are extolled. Liberty is hailed as the 'Life-source of Truth'. Reason is upheld. Love is now their only creed and pleasant and joyous music pervades their whole existence. The suicide spirits welcome the coming of the reign of Gentleness, Love, Truth, Genius and Song, and together hymn their praise.

As an epic, Cooper's Purgatory of Suicides does not meet some of the genre stipulations. For instance, it is not a dispassionate recital; it is as strongly passionate as his own nature. Nor is it a dignified rhythmic narrative, for it verges on the doggerel. On the other hand, its theme has a sublime end and involves well-known historical figures. The dream-device had been resorted to by earlier poets, as in the case of Dante and Shelley. In its exploration of the underworld, it awakens the sense of the mysterious and, in certain parts, particularly in Book the Third, the reader is stunned by the awful. It does not begin in medias res as in Homer, Virgil and Milton, but, as in Dante, it begins at the beginning. It exhibits the developing and changing attitudes of royalties towards the idea of Equality, as definitely hostile in their first meeting becoming less so by the middle of the poem, and, then, joyfully embracing it at the end. Like Milton's Paradise Lost, its

concern is not with an individual but with the whole race of man and the triumph of the democratic idea of Equality in this world as well as in the after life. Following the precedence of other epic writers, Cooper uses the technique of invocation in his address, for example, to the Sun and to Liberty. In the Purgatory of Suicides, as in the Divine Comedy, there is no single character of epic stature dominating all episodes; it only tells of the adventures of the narrator and the scenes he dreams of in the underworld. In terms of universality, the Purgatory of Suicides, like Paradise Lost, has the widest universal interest, for it has, as one of its aims, the combat of evil and the ultimate establishment of a happy and fraternal society based on equality, regardless of religion, colour and race. And this undoutedly is of prime human interest.

Cooper was well-read in the classical tradition of the epic. He knew Greek and Latin and his regard for Milton was profound. He was also well-versed in Shelley's prophetic and revolutionary poetry. In the beginning of his poem, the poet dreams of sailing to Hades where he explores new places. He then comes across the shades of historical suicides and is able to interpret their mute utterings. The shades hold their meetings in a huge cavern with a gigantic dome and innumerable aisles. The exploration of new lands, the assemblies of

illustrious personages, and the building or place where they gather run parallel to better-known scenes in the Odyssey, Aeneid and Paradise Lost. The shades of Judas and Castlereagh, in Cooper, are reminders of Scylla and Charybdis in the Odyssey or, better still, of Sin and Death in Paradise Lost.

Cooper's Chartist experience served to intensify attitudes he already held. However, it undoubtedly gave them coherent form and depth. As a result, his poem is coloured and imbibed with his Chartist views. As he himself puts it in the preface of the poem :

> the political strife in which I have been engaged has certainly given a form and colour to my thoughts which they could not have worn had my conception been realized at an earlier period.[2]

In fact, the first six stanzas, as mentioned before, embody his exhortation to the miners in the Potteries to go on strike until their rights are recognized. In the first stanza he fervidly addresses them :

> Slaves toil no more! Why delve, and moil, and mine,
> To glut the tyrant forgers of your chain?,
> Slaves, toil no more! Up, from the midnight mine,
> Summon your swarthy thousands to the plain;
> Beneath the bright sun marshalled, swell the strain
> Of liberty; and while the lordlings view
> Your banded hosts, with stricken heart and brain,
> Shout, as one man, __'Toil we no more renew,
> Until the Many cease their slavery to the Few!'[3]

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2. Thomas Cooper : The Purgatory of Suicides, Chapman and Hall, 1853, p. v.
3. Ibid., Book the First, p. 3.

Throughout the poem, Cooper's sympathetic attitude towards the poor is underlined. In Book the Third, for instance, he directs his shafts at tyrants and taxmen who fatten on the spoils forcibly seized from the poor. In the exordia to Books the Fourth and the Tenth, the New Poor Law and its sponsor in Parliament, Lord Brougham, are passionately satirized and ridiculed. The whole poem is indeed written with the view of upholding the ideas of equality and the franchise.

A brief discussion of the critics' views of the poem's structure would help shed more light on this point. R.J. Conklin claims that the exordia "have no connection with the dream proper"[4] and proceeds to discuss the poem separating the former from the latter, thus deepening the impression that the link between the two is missing. Ethel Ramage, too bluntly perhaps, says that there is neither a coordinated story nor logical connection between the parts, while Professor Philip Collins remarks that the Purgatory of Suicides lacks a narrative structure.[5] To begin with, one has to concede the last remark; the poem does not tell a story. It is more or less a spiritual voyage comprising a series of exploratory visits to several regions in Hades where the poet listens to the debates of suicide shades. In different and separate tableaux, these characters discuss several but connected themes, such as regal

4. R.J. Conklin, Thomas Cooper, the Chartist, Manila, 1935, p. 215
5. Ethel Ramage, p. 224; Philip Collins, p. 12.

and mental pride, political treachery and tyranny, monarchical and clerical oppression, how to quell evil and help promote love and truth, the 'Mind's omnipotence', and Gentleness as the guiding star of the mind to acquire Wisdom and establish joy and peace on earth as well as in Hades. In other words, the poem is a philosophic search for founding the reign of Brotherhood.

The second point to be discussed here with regard to the poem's structural unity is the connection between the exordia and the dreams. This can be established if we define the poem as Cooper's interior monologue in which he gives expression to his conscious and half conscious thoughts, feelings, memories and associations. In Book the Third, for example, the poet invokes the Sun which is identified, as in Dante, with Christ. His thoughts of Christ remind him of the disciples including Judas Iscariot who betrayed his master to the hostile Jews. Like Judas, Castlereagh was looked upon as a traitor to his country, Ireland, and her patriotic sons. The link between the two traitors, then, is not unreasonable.

Moreover, the interpretation of dreams as the unconscious reflections of the dreamer's conscious wishes would shed further light on the connection between the exordia and the

dreams. In Book the First, for example, the poet's despondent and gloomy state while in dungeon leads him to ponder over the qeustion of life and death and makes him, in his dream, recall the spirits of famous suicides. The poor's suppression and miserable lot, which the poet had been fighting against, unsurprisingly give rise to the themes of political tyranny and equality. Admittedly, the link sometimes is weak and brittle, as in Book the Second; nevertheless, it is there.

Furthermore, the unity of certain Books is also cemented with the use of related images. For instance, the vision in Book the Third is pervaded with the images of snakes, disease and blood, which also create a vivid and horrifyingly graphic picture. It is also relevant here to point out that the unity of the poem is further enhanced by the fact that the last line in Book the Tenth is a repetition of the last line in the first stanza of Book the First.

However, lack of action is a grave deficiency that seriously mars Cooper's poem. It is largely given over to rhetorical speeches, descriptions and comments, creating an unmistaken sense of monotony in a number of its Books, particularly Book the Eighth which is the least interesting and monotonous. Moreover, there is not the least attempt on the

poet's part to cover up his political message or clothe it with symbols and myths, as Shelley does, in order to make it more acceptable. As a result, critics find it intolerably tedious and feel discouraged to read it through.

In the hands of Cooper, the Spenserian stanza, though it signals the influence of Byron, as Professor Philip Collins remarks,[6] has a far different rhythm from the 'anvil ring' of the earlier poet's. It is often prosaic, sluggish, and lacking in vigour. Sometimes the poet is so carried away with the rugged intensity of emotions expressed or the argument presented that the alexandrine at the end of the stanza does not function properly in its capacity as a temporary brake, resulting in grammatical complications. Sometimes the poet's imagination cannot sustain the effort required to round off the stanza and the episode becomes clearly laboured. The fourth line hardly ever closes a rhythmical quatrain at this obvious place of rest. The rhythm is, more often than not, imperfect and faulty as in his attempt to rhyme 'wise' and 'miseries', 'bound' and 'wound', 'took' and 'rewoke', 'blaze' and 'days'. The invective sometimes rises to shrillness as, for example, in the altercation between the shades of Judas and Castlereagh, in the course of which the passionate syntax reaches so high a pitch that it becomes disagreeably sharp.

6. Philip Collins, p. 13.

This does not mean that the poem is totally lacking in artistic merit. The greater parts of the exordia are reasonably tolerable to read, probably because they are charged with sincere emotions emanating from Cooper's passionate nature. One of the loveliest, if not the loveliest, is the exordium to Book the Fourth. The idea of the free and happy robin may have been suggested to Cooper by Byron's bird in "The Prisoner of Chillon" or by Wordsworth's sonnet "To the Cuckoo". The apostrophe to robin redbreast, in Cooper, is perhaps the most lyrical and unified episode in the poem. It beautifully opens :

> Welcome, sweet Robin! welcome, cheerful one!
> Why dost thou slight the merry fields of corn,
> The sounds of human joy, the plenty strown
> From Autumn's teeming lap; and, by gray morn,
> Ere the sun wakes, sing thus to things of scorn
> And infamy and want and sadness whom
> Their stronger fellow-criminals have torn
> From freedom and the gladsome light of home,
> To quench the nobler spark within, in dungeon'd gloom ?[7]

The contrast between the free bird and the chained prisoner is highlighted by contrasting "the margent of some silver spring/ Mantled with golden lilies" with the "prison rampart".[8] It is further underlined by the poet's reference to the heavenly sound of the bird and the "dissonance of bolts and bars that gird/old England's modern slaves".[9] The image, in stanza IV, of a group

7. Op. cit., Book the Fourth, stanza I, p. 135.
8. Ibid., Book the Fourth, stanza II, p. 135.
9. Ibid., Book the Fourth, stanza V, p. 136.

of children, amid the hawthrone blending with fruit, joyfully shouting at the robin is apt and heart-cheering.

Irony, in the hands of Cooper, could be sharp and piercing. One of the best examples is found in Nero's speech in which he tells Antony :

> That Thrones to thy stout valour awe huge debt,-
> -
> Is true as that thou wert an anchoret!
> Hero of Actium! — Vestal of the Nile! —
> No time, on earth, your effigies shall spoil
> Of lasting laurels, — wreath so fitly blending
> With Daphne's virtue valour without soil!
> In Hades, triumphs, coy loves never ending
> Shall still be yours, - the future the bright
> past transcending! 10

Cooper's vision of the future, though rhetorical, is also rewarding to read. The advent of the millennium is being prepared for by the discussions or exchange of views in Books the First and the Sixth which pave the way or act as heralds for the coming of the Jubilee of Brotherhood celebrated in the final book of the poem. In Book the First, the spirits of kings, princes and outstanding leaders meet in a cavern with a huge dome and numberless aisles. The heavenly arch is propped with the strong sinews of the shapes of "Satyrs, with wild-goats' legs and beard,/ And one-eyed Arimasp and Cyclops",[11] aided by

10. Ibid.,Books the First, stanza CII, p. 37.
11. Ibid., Book the First, stanza XLI, p. 16.

Scythians, Ethiops, and other countless monsters. The thrones are decorated with "chimeras blending grim/ Fierce forms with fascinations"[12] or overcanopied

> With perforated carvery, rose, — a pile
> Of frail aerial wonder, — typified
> Were Fright and Mischief mixt with stealth and Guile:
> Hag rode her broomstaff, flankt with bugbear vile
> And goggle-eyed hobgoblin, while a host
> Led by Puck-Hairy mocked with infantile
> And puny trick the snake that wreathed and tossed
> His trail around the skull and cross-bones of grim ghost.[13]

In the same book, all the speakers, except Lycurgus, forthright reject the idea of Equality. They are united in their refusal to concede to the claims made in its behalf. However, differences among them can mainly be discerned in Antony's speech in which he attacks the defunct idea of the hereditary rights of kings. As an alternative he maintains that

> Souls paramount
> Become by Fate : Nature in her great fount
> Moulds monarchs, who earth's sceptres seize, and thrust
> Old palsied cumber-thrones aside, to mount,
> Themselves, the seat of sway.[14]

Chow-Sin and Nero are also led, through their chauvinism, to oppose each other and set China's civilisation against that of

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12. Ibid., Book the First, Stanza XLVI, p. 18.
13. Ibid., Book the First, Stanza XLVII, p. 18.
14. Ibid., Book the First, Stanza XCI, p. 22.

Rome. Mithridates' stand, though essentially the same as the others', as far as the idea of Equality is concerned, is however less antagonistic to Lycurgus whom he respectfully addresses as 'illustrious' and 'wise'.

On the other hand, Lycurgus realizes that he is isolated and, with tongue in cheek, defends his prophecy. He argues that Humanity should be held higher than empty regal pomps. The strongest point he makes against the enthroned shapes is that there is no perpetuity and that "from past change, more change our state awaiting".[15] Freedom, he adds, is having her impact felt in different parts of Europe, and Asia and Africa will certainly listen to her holy call. With intellectual foresight he prophesies that :

> love fraternal shall with sheen
> Genial and mild dissolve the marble mien
> Of Selfishness to soft beneficence;
> Until, as yearned the godlike Nazarene,
> It yearns o'er pain and woe, with affluence,
> Of healing help and soul-restoring condolence.[16]

But he ends his speech on a rather diffident note :

> I cease my theme; and may have erred, -for frail
> Is still our wisdon : it may be, the Few
> Shall still the Many trample and subdue:
> That Truth and Liberty shall bloom - to die,
> Like glorious winged things, that, swift, pursue
> The sunbeam-atoms for a day, then hie
> To death: blending as 't were, a breath- a smile -
> a sigh![17]

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15. Ibid., Book the First, stanza, CXVII, p. 45.
16. Ibid., Book the First, stanza CXL, p. 49.
17. Ibid., Book the First, stanza CXL II, p. 50.

Looking for support, he tactfully seeks permission to let other sages participate in the discussion. Consequently, messengers, including the spirits of Lucan, Samson, Robert le Diable, and Varus, are sent to summon shades residing in other parts of Hades.

The outcome of the debate in Book the Sixth is almost the reverse of that in Book the First. In a mysterious way, the shapes of Appius, Nero, Bonosus and Achitophel, representing the hard core of the opposition to Equality, are made to vanish and their places are, for a short while, taken over by ugly and monstrous beasts. The ominous hand, similar to the one that appeared to Nebuchadnezzar on the eve of his overthrow, hanging from the roof and threateningly pointing at 'the throneless void', fills the others with dread and deep apprehension; it makes them ready to relent. Hannibal and Mithridates occupy a middle ground; they express their belief in virtue and human rights while still resisting the claim of Equality. Significantly, the great king of Pontus, in one of the very few epic similes in the poem, is thus described :

> like a veteran seaman who would keep
> Undaunted heart, though sails and cordage rent,
> And rudder broken, render impotent
> The pilot's strength and skill, - and fear and grief

> Burst from young sailors' tongues with eloquent
> Expression of despair, - the Pontic chief,
> Though shook, thus sought, with speech, to
> minister relief.[18]

The other contributors vigorously voice their support for Lycurgus. In his address to the assembled kings, Caius Gracchus, echoing Milton's famous argument, foretells of future changes :

> But Evil brings forth Good, as Good, of old
> Produced Evil,- so now, when all things shew
> The mystery of Being doth unfold
> Some glimpses of its issue; and the True
> From out the hollow False doth brightly glow,
> And cannot, longer, be from Man concealed, -
> So now, Good shall result from Evil : woe
> And want shall cease; Man's heart-ache shall
> be healed;
> And, in your fall, the true Elysium be revealed.[19]

With such contributions of summoned spirits, Lycurgus gains more ground and strenghtens his position. Towards the end of the Book, the shade of the Spartan sage briefly reviews the history of mankind and put the blame for the loss of the ideals of Equality and Freedom on man's ignorance as well as on kings and priests. The revolution in France is referred to as an illustration of the dangers of craft and treason. He also maintains that Knowledge has now come to the aid of Right and is guiding young Freedom to put an end to Power, Privilege, and man's misery.

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18. Ibid., Book the Sixth, stanza CVII, p. 224.
19. Ibid., Book the Sixth, stanza LXXI, p. 212.

In Book the Tenth, the reader is presented with a spiritual Pantheon of the Good, the Free, the Tireless, and the Great. Accepting the Godwinian pricniple of man's infinite capacity for improvement, Cooper ends the poem with the establishment of the millennium of bliss. All impediments have been removed. Mercy, at long last, has won. On earth, there is no more bloodshed. Life, after a hard struggle, is free from anger, hatred, revenge, and cruelty. War is over. Hunger and distress are abolished. Gentleness, as a magic wand, has brought about this new state of things. She patiently nourished the spark of Freedom when man's hopes in Liberty grew dim. Now Truth has conquered and Forgiveness has triumphed. Love has even won over former foes and revealed the heart's kindness. Sadness is bidden farewell.

The trumpet's peal summons all spirits to the hall of kings and they joyously proceed there to the accompaniment of the sweet sounds of flutes, viols and drums. In the hall itself, the monarchal thrones have been removed. The angry and ugly shapes, which have been there before propping the rainbowed roof, are replaced by bright, lively images with fair wings, beautiful and graceful. The spirits happily smile at each other. Pride and rank have been done away with. No one thinks of himself as nobler than the others. They all mingle with each other on

equal footing. Lycurgus, nicknamed the true seer, proclaims, the end of all pain, hate and torture, and the prevalence of Brotherhood and Joy. Other speackers denounce the past and praise their new bliss. The soul, according to Mithridates, is now free from proud and vain phantasies. The defeat of evil, it is said, has ushered in Earth's glorious day. With the help of Science, the sea has now become man's pathway and his chariots are swiftly crossing it. Mountains, streams and mines provide him with wealth. Disease has been overcome and life is made trebly longer. Light, wind and flood are controlled by man. Man's moral victory is proclaimed as the first step which empowered him to nullify Earth's ills. In the past, Necessity prevailed. The flame, flood and wind were man's masters before thought set him free. Circumstances and Mind had to play their active roles before truths were evolved. One thought, with the chain of consequence, led to another until mighty Mind has conquered violence, fraud, ignorance, want, woe, and pain. The Mind now reigns supreme throughout the universe. Only when Pride and Power embraced the signs of Brotherhood has the glorious dawn of Bliss appeared. Poetry, music, sculpture and architecture are also praised for refining man's mind. Together all spirits

rise up and sing of love and joy.

'Earth's children raise their universal song
'Oh love and joy:mountain, and strand, and sea
'Are vocal with your praise! Spirits prolong
'The strain: through endless life they anthem ye -
'Their endless afterlife of jubilee:
'And hymning ye our essences enhance
'Still more the bliss-gauge of their destiny, -
'Assured more deeply of their heritance,
'The more their joyous thought hath joyous utterance![20]

The materials that went into the making of The Purgatory of Suicides are many and varied. The poem, as Martha Vicinus says, is indeed a tour de force.[21] It conspicuously reflects the wide range of Cooper's readings in history, philosophy, science and literature. One of the topics the poem discusses is the outdated theory of the divine rights of kings. This theory is at first defended by the shade of Sardanapalus, the last king of the Assyrian empire of Ninus, who hurls defiance at Lycurgus and asserts that the latter's is a false and foolish dream. Monarchs, according to him, rule by 'Nature's law' and those who rebel against it uproot all happiness, disturb peace, and change men into brutes. He is seconded, on this point, by the shade of the Chinese emperor, Chow-Sin, who alleges that liberty breeds anarchy and means the end of all courtesies. Antony, who is no champion of equality, disputes the old-fashioned views of the two previous speakers and maintains that monarchs are moulded by Nature and

20. Ibid., Book the Tenth, stanza CXXV, p. 360.
21. Martha Vicinus, The Industrial Muse, Croom Helm, London, p. 98.

that customs have made man stagnant. Inherent in the debate are the two opposed and conflicting views of change and standstill. The Pontic king accedes to the idea of change as an outcome of intellectual power. But it is Lycurgus who, in the course of the discussion, emerges as its chief propagator and tries to illustrate his viewpoint by examples taken from modern times. At the end of the poem, when the reign of equality sets in, a glowing tribute is paid to the acute mental powers of Lycurgus. And Lucretius, the Roman poet and philosopher, fitfully addresses him :

> Few were thy words, Lycurgus, but profound
> In truth: from earliest eld all was designed
> Or ordered that hath been: Nature's great round
> Must needs by travelled: Circumstance and Mind,
> Alike, must be brought forth, and be combined,
> Were mightiest Truths evolved: Necessity
> O'er all prevailed: the flame, the flood, the wind
> Were masters till the march of Thought set free
> The world of struggling men from that old tyranny.[22]

Cooper's knowledge of history was certainly wide, if not deep. His epic is crowded with characters taken from ancient Greece, Rome, Carthage, China, India, Egypt and Assyria. It is not even lacking in Hebraic personalities. Others are also drawn from Mexico and France. The contemporary social scene in Britain is eagerly explored and vehemently assailed. Castlereagh, the

22. Op. Cit., Book the Tenth, stanza CIX, p. 355.

marked butt for all English radicals in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, figures largely and is abusively declaimed in Book the Third. The condition of the poor is dwelt upon in the exordia to several books. In Book the Fourth, for example, the workhouses are called 'Bastilles', echoing the contemporary popular word coined for them. Lord Brougham, the chief propagator of the New Poor Law (1834), is referred to as the arch-traitor who held up the poison-cup to the poor and severed husband from wife and child. In the course of the poem, the peasant leader Wat Tyler, the Scot William Wallace, the Swiss William Tell, Washington, the American, and the Irish Fitzgerald, Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet are hailed as freedom-fighters. Fellow Chartists, such as Frost and Shell, who participated in the Newport rise of 1839, are highly praised and reverently pointed out as glorious examples to be emulated.[23] The term 'freedom-fighter' is so broadened in its application to include people like Gutenberg and Caxton, of the printing press, religious leaders as Luther, Wycliffe and Latimer, and divers thinkers and philosophers, such as Erasmus, Hobbes, Hume, Locke, Spinoza, Voltaire, Rousseau, Godwin, Pascal, Cartwright and Owen. Towards the end of the poem, the poet nobly expresses his readiness to shed his blood in the cause of Freedom and adds :

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23. The stanzas on Frost, Shell, and also Ellis were later omitted from the 1877 edition.

Let me not fail
To keep my soul's resolve; and then unwomb
What will, ere I attain my final doom,
Right blythely will I on! - yea, meet grim
Death
Himself in peace: for what viaticum
Need we, if Death be unto Life the path,
But truthfulness of heart? is it not more than
faith?[24]

During the Victorian period, particularly after the publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859, the controversy over man's evolution fiercely raged and was directly linked to the question of faith and doubt. Few deep-thinking writers at the time escaped the implications of Darwin's theory and its vicissitudes. Even before it was formulated and published in book form, the evolutionary theory was in the air and many people felt its imprints. Tennyson, for example, though deeply religious, was not free from the pangs of doubt, which are voiced in a number of his poems. In his great elegy, In Memoriam, he significantly writes :

There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.
(In Memoriam, Section XCVI)

Many Chartists had a sceptic view of religion, probably for different reasons. They held the clergy in deep contempt and realized that the rich man's religion was all humbug, for it was in sharp contrast to Christ's simple life and practices. Cooper's

24. Op. Cit., Book the Tenth, stanza XXIX, p. 328.

attitude towards religion was also vitiated with disturbing doubts and agonizing uncertainties. His religious fluctuations and conversions are of interest: they find their way into his epic. In Chapter 24 of his Autobiography, he charts out certain developments in his religious beliefs. He tells his readers that after leaving the Methodists in 1835, he avoided conversation on theological topics. While talking to the Leicester Chartists he gave up his belief in the Methodist doctrine of eternal punishment but did not cease to worship the moral beauty of Christ. Shortly before leaving Leicester and embarking on his trip through the Potteries, he was assailed with atheistic reasonings. The next stage came with his imprisonment in May 1843 when he became conscious of "atheistic reasonings becoming habitual."[25] He then decided to pray no more. When he was set free he fell under the spell of Strauss but never preached blank atheism. After his dramatic reconversion to Christianity, made on a public platform at the Hall of Science in 1856, he introduced a few alterations in the text of his poem to tone down his hostility to Christianity and Christian clergymen. However, it is significant that the Festival of Brotherhood, in Book the Tenth, is participated in by almost all spirits - Christians, Moslems, Jews, atheists and agnostics.

In the exordium to Book the Sixth, Cooper attacks capital punishment and lashes out at priests for taking part in

25. Autobiography, p. 261.

its performance :

> Hah! curse upon thee priest ! - is it well done,
> That thou, a peace-robed herald pattering prayers,
> Dost head the death march? [26]

He subsequently resumes his denunciation of priests calling them hypocrites and accusing them of double-dealing. On the one hand, they 'prop kings' sway'; on the other, they preach meekness or 'Christ's precepts' to the poor. The execution scene leads him to ponder over the laws of Moses, Jehovah, and of Christ. He feels bewildered: which to believe and who to follow. His sense of loss and confusion is effectively given expression to in the following lines, with their impressive image of the spider :

> Hah! murderous spider! when I watched thee spread
> Thy cobweb yestermorn, it did relieve
> A dreary prison-hour to mark each thread
> From thee, thou magic artisan, receive
> Its faery texture: while I saw thee weave
> That daedal miracle, this poison-thought
> Rose not that now impelleth me to grieve
> Much more than to admire - to grieve and doubt,
> As, in a torment-web, like thy poor victim, caught! [27]

Tyrants in the past, the poet says, used to massacre "The scurvy slaves who insolently dared/To murmur."[28] Now they have only changed their methods and, in a combination of bitter sarcasm and irony, Cooper addresses the poor :

> The sword in ye were barb'rous: ye shall die
> Humanely slow: and they will meekly try
> In peace to end ye! 'Tis the radiant dawn
> Of Christian Civilization! [29]

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26. Op. Cit., Book the Sixth, stanza II, p. 180.
27. Ibid., Book the Sixth, stanza XXIII, p. 196.
28. Ibid., Book the Fifth, stanza XXII, p. 166.
29. Ibid., Book the Fifth, stanza XXIII, p. 166.

However, in the exordium to Book the Third, the moral beauty of Christ is recognised and painfully groped for in the darkness of doubt. Of Christ, he says :

> I love the Galilean; Lord and Christ
> such goodness I could own; and though enshrined
> In flesh, could worship. If emparadised,
> Beyond the grave, no Eden I could find
> Restored, though all the good of humankind
> Were there, and not that yearning One, the Poor
> Who healed, and fed, and blest! Nay to my mind
> Hell would be heaven, with him. Horror no more
> Could fright, if such benighnant beauty trod
> its shore![30]

But doubt assails him and he scentically cries :

> "I would the tale were true"[31]

In Book the Fifth, too, the poet projects his inner soliloquy, on faith and doubt, on to the protagonists. God and religion are vociferously denounced by several of the speakers, but the shade of Roland dissents and tries to counteract their argument, maintaining that the universe reflects the wisdom of its Architect. And in the flimsy reasoning of Roland, one can discern the thread that later led Cooper back to religion. But the latter's stand, as it is clearly reflected in the poem, is that of the agnostic. Stanza XXXI, in Book the Sixth, declares his creed and, at the same time, reveals his torturous search for something tangible and substantial, not murky and illusive :

30. Ibid., Book the Third, stanza XXII, p. 96.
31. Ibid., Book the Third, stanza XXIII, p. 96.

I say not that there is no God : but that
I know not. Dost thou know, or dost thou guess?
Why should I ask thee, priest? Darkness hath sat
With Light on Nature - Woe with Happiness
Since human worms crawled from their languageless
Imperfect embryons , and by signs essayed
To picture their first thoughts, 'Tis but excess
Of folly to attempt the great charade
To solve : and yet the irking wish must be obeyed![32]

On the question of moral and physical force, Cooper underwent certain changes, too. Before his imprisonment he was full of enthusiasm and admiration for Feargus O'Connor and his brand of physical force. In his prison cell, Cooper had time to ponder over this question and, in the course of his poem, ventilates his views. His leanings towards the use of force against oppressors are revealed in Book the Fourth, stanza XVII, which also shows him vacillating between condemnation of the poor, for their servile submission to the rich, and sympathy for them. But the stanza ends on a threatening note :

Cowards, - why did ye suffer knaves to forge
These eunuch-fetters? - why so tamely don
These chains? -
Beshrew this rising in my gorge
To think that others 'neath their fetters groan,
And do not break them! - Wear I not my own?
Ay, and must wear them, while my tyrants choose.
Well: let me bide my time; and, then, atone
For that real crime - the failing to arouse
Slaves against tyrants. I may, yet, before life's close. -[33]

A similar intransigent attitude is also expressed in the exordium to Book the Fifth, in which he gives vent to his angry

32. Ibid., Book the Sixth, stanza XXXI, p. 199
33. Ibid., Book the Fourth, stanza XVII, p. 140.

thoughts on the prostrate and abject 'slaves' of Leicester, Manchester and Lancaster, trying in the same breath to restrain his anger and to find excuses for their submissiveness. Immediately after, he turns his thoughts to Frost and Shell, the Welsh Chartists who took to arms to resist tyranny. These stanzas show that, so far, Cooper was still in symapthy with the ideas of the 'physical force' party among the Chartists. But a change in his attitude becomes apparent in Book the Sixth. There, his musing over the question of faith and doubt leads him to underline the importance of love in winning people over to the cause of Right. Henceforth, kindness, gentleness and love are stressed by the poet and favourably contrasted with the futile use of violence. Book the Tenth reveals Cooper's complete conversion to the 'moral force' ideal. The age of brotherhood, he believes, is to be brought about not by force, but by fraternity and education. He holds up the example of the French Revolution and what it resulted in as a warning against the resort to violence.

Cooper's epic teems with names of literary and artistic figures, real, legendary and mythological. The English poets Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley and Byron are invoked in the exordium to Book the Second. The English Chatterton, the Greek Sappho, and the Romans Lucretius and Lucan make their appearance in Book the Fourth. Others, as far apart, in terms of

time, as Apelles, the Greek painter, Orpheus, Hero and Leander, Galatea, and the German composer Handel are brought in to illustrate the width and breadth of Cooper's knowledge.

The poem resounds with echoes from several sources, poets and writers such as Milton, Shelley, Shakespeare, Virgil, Wordsworth, and Byron. To the Chartists, in general, Milton's attraction, as Professor Philip Collins says, was 'literary, religious, and political'.[34] A.K. Stevens, in his essay, "Milton and Chartism", has pointed out, inaccurately though, that in Book the Second of Cooper's epic, "Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Byron, and Shelley receive less than a stanza each; Milton has eight stanzas in which he is directly addressed and ten more in which he serves as a guide to Cooper on a second trip to Hades".[35]

The poem in fact abounds in reference to and quotations from Milton's works. In the exordium to Book the Second, Cooper says that both Milton and he have similarly fallen on 'evil days'. Comparing himself with his blind predecessor, the captive poet strikes an optimistic note :

> Since thou 'mid 'darkness' lone could'st joy.
> I'll deem
> This grated cell no dungeon of a thrall,
> But banquet-chamber where the Mind holds festival![36]

34. Op. Cit., p. 18.
35. A.K. Stevens, "Milton and Chartism", in the Philological Quarterly, Vol. XII, part 4, 1933, p. 386.
36. Op. Cit., Book the Second, stanza IX, p. 58.

From Comus, Cooper quotes a line to express his gratitude to his great compeer for

> !Smoothing the raven down of darkness till it smiled!'[37]

He also pledges to dedicate himself to the cause of the commonweal, fought for by Hampden, Pym and Sidney, and, quoting "L'Allegro", expresses determination to win back 'mountain nymph, sweet liberty'.[38] Paradise Lost, too, provides Cooper with some quotations and references as in stanzas XVI, XVIII, and XX of Book the Second. The epithets to Empedocles and Cleombrotus, in stanzas XXIV and XXV respectively, are taken down from Paradise Lost, Book Three, lines 469 - 473. Certain Miltonic clauses and phrases, about Truth grappling with Falsehood, as mentioned in The Areopagitica, find their way into Cooper's poem, Book the Seventh, stanza XXIII. "Lycidas", as R.J. Conklin says, has undoubtedly supplied the pattern for the following lines :

> Lyre of my fatherland! anew, to wake
> Thy solemn shell, I come, with trembling hand,
> Feeling my rudeness doth harsh discord make.[39]

Several passages in Cooper help raise the ghost of similar ones in Milton. For instance, Cooper's Underworld is as dark as Milton's Hell in Paradise Lost. The similarity is further

37. Ibid., Book the Second, stanza X, p. 58.
38. Milton, "L'Allegro", l. 36.
39. Op. Cit., Book the Second, stanza I, p. 55.

underlined in Book the Eighth, in which the narrator, endowed with spiritual eyes, could see through the thick darkness 'Emblems of mortal gloom and miseries'.[40] Such a scene reminds the reader of the pervasive darkness in Milton's Hell, revealing 'sights of woe,'Regions of sorrow, doleful shades..'[41] Moreover, Milton's Pandemonium is strikingly paralleled by Cooper's huge cave where the 'sceptred suicides', like Satan and his peers, assemble :

> And there eternity itself beguile
> With pregnant descant on their earthly fall,
> On fate, and mortal change, and being spiritual.[42]

Another echo from Paradise Lost, could furthermore be discerned in Condorcet's discourse with his French compatriots. In it, the ghost of Condorcet defiantly asks why the Almighty has to exercise his everlasting anger on an erring being and sneeringly supplies the answer, echoing Mammon's words in the council of the rebel angels :

> That the quire
> Celestial may His spotless glory sing —
> His attributes harmonius made by dire
> Infliction on his worms of suffering,
> And He himself in joy ecstatic revelling![43]

Condorcet's pose is indeed a reminder of that of Satan and his crew.

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40. Ibid., Book the Eighth, stanza XXVIII, p. 278.
41. Milton, Paradise Lost, Book, I, 11. 64-65.
42. Op. Cit., Book the First, stanza XVIII, p. 15.
43. Ibid., Book the Fifth, stanza XLI, p. 172.

Milton's influence on Cooper could also be perceived in the latter's style and diction. Even if efforts are limited to Book the First only, the following examples could be cited. In his unnecessary and unconvincing attempt to give his epic a distancing touch and an unfamiliar air, the poet resorts to the inclusion of archaic words, such as : fain, 'cleping, emprize, dern, ween, groin, metope, frore, surceased, wot. The following are also examples of unusual words of Latin origin : exarch, reflex, infract, conglobated, vetebra, tiara'd, viticination, putrescence, desuetude. A particularly Miltonic device of placing a noun between two or three adjectives is imitated by Cooper, as in "Old shapes columnar", "countless monsters stark", "demon foes/Ubiquitous, relentless", "various art/Pictorial", "young Octavius meek/ And crafty". Examples of unusual compound epithets are : "gem-dropp'd triglyphs ", "shrine-shaped throne", "goggle -eyed hobgoblin", "wave-washed coast", "health-fraught veins", "self-sung laud". Sometimes a substantive is used as a verb or an adjective, as in : "let grateful kings bow down/ And homage thee", "Of images our being, since all intern/ They germ", "traitor dagger" and "rebel pike". Intentional repetition of words or phrases is also resorted to. Another feature, that is the use of uninterrupted series of words, whether nouns or qualifiers, is also included, as in: "unimagined, unconceived, unknown, /Unspeakable", "heads, tails, arms, /Tusks,

horns", "elephant, ape, shark,/ Serpent, dog, crocodile, or ox", "the soul, the pride, pain, thought, or deed". All these devices, among others, are found in Paradise Lost.

Another major source which inspired Cooper and particularly helped shape his vision of the future is Shelley's poetical works. Shelley's outspoken stand against tyranny and his unwavering belief in a future society based on love, equality, and wisdom, as persistently outlined in Queen Mab, The Revolt of Islam, and Prometheus Unbound, attracted the attention of the Chartists and their literary articles were full of praise and admiration for his ideas and convictions. The central sections in Queen Mab can briefly be stated to contain a picture of the present in which Shelley vigorously denounces, Monarchy, the Aristocracy, and the Church, while the final two cantos present an optimistic and hopeful vision of the future. This happy vision is again taken up by Shelley in his well-known lyrical drama, Prometheus Unbound. The Revolt of Islam was written, as the poet mentions in the preface, with the view of

> kindling within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind.[44]

44. Shelley, Poetical Works, 1970, p. 32.

Cooper's festival of Brotherhood,or, in other words, his vision of the future is, beyond any doubt, thoroughly imbibed with views borrowed from or influenced by similar episodes in Shelley. In Queen Mab, canto VIII, the fairy Queen, talking to the spirit of Ianthe, describes the future when equality is established, peace prevails, and "happiness/ And science dawn though late upon the earth".[45] Loane or Cythna, in the Revolt of Islam, Canto V, speaks to crowds of spirits after the temporary victory of the revolution in the Golden City. In her speech, Wisdom is glorified. Under the new circumstances, she claims, Scorn, Hate, Revenge, and Selfishness are to make way for Pity, Peace and Love. Equality is regarded as divine. Science and poetry, according to her "Shall clothe in light the fields and cities of the free".[46] Kings will be dethroned and Joy and Truth will reign supreme over the world. The concluding speech of the Spirit of the Hour, in Prometheus Unbound, act III, scene iv, tells of her vision at the time of the reunion of Prometheus and Asia. Under the new circumstances, hate and fear are put an end to. Thrones are kingless. The sparks of love and hope in the human heart are effectively nourished and jealously guarded. Wisdom, freedom, and equality with men are gained by women. Man is now :

45. Ibid., Queen, Mab, canto VIII, ll, 227-28, p. 796.
46. Ibid., Revolt of Islam, Canto V, section 5, l. 2256, p. 92.

> Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
> Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless.[47]

Like Shelley's Chorus of Spirits in Prometheus Unbound, Cooper's chorus of suicide spirits celebrates the triumph of Love and Thought in a world wielded by Wisdom.

Further analogy can be drawn between several passages in both Shelley and Cooper. The latter's cave of illustrious kings, which parallels Milton's Pandemonium, has even closer affinity with Shelley's Temple with its senate of the Great, as described in The Revolt of Islam, Canto I. Condorcet's blasphemic stand, resembling that of Satan, also recalls to mind the phantasm of Jupiter recalling Prometheus' earlier curse. Man's Mind, as Condorcet quotes it, would boldly tell the crafty priests :

> 'I dare your monster God! - nor will I shrink
> 'His tyrant tortures to defy — ev'n though I sink
>
> 'Amid the bottomless abyss of pain
> 'Ye say He hath created for his slaves!
> 'There let Him hurl me! - and, despite the chain
> 'That spiritually binds me under waves
> 'Of liquid flame, He shall find me one who braves
> 'His wrath, and hurls back hatred for a God
> 'Who forms without their will His creatures, - graves
> 'Their natures on them, rules by his own nod
> 'Of providence, their lives, - and, then, beneath his rod -
> 'His scourge eternal tortures them, without
> 'Surcease or intermission!'

47. Ibid., Prometheus Unbound, Act III, sc. iv, ll. 194-5, p. 253.

And the spirit of Condorcet immediately proceeds to comment :

> Endless fire
> For a breath's error - for a moment's doubt!
> Infinite Greatness exercising ire
> Relentless on a worm![48]

Echoes of Shelley's "Ozymandias" reverberate in at least two passages of The Purgatory of Suicides. The first is found in Book the First, stanza LXXXIII, in which Chow-Sin makes the claim that China's heritage of art and philosophy has endured

> while pyramid
> And column, arch and dome, taunt human kind
> With ruin, where the founders' namesare hid, —
> And dust becomes of Death a mirror pellucid.[49]

Again, in Book the Fifth, the poet in his dream comes across several statues :

> each the aim
> Vain-glorious of its founders making known
> More by its wreck than record of the name
> Or deed it had been stablished to proclaim.[50]

Many other passages in Cooper help call to mind other writers and works. Shakespeare's influence on the Chartist poet does not lag far behind that of Milton and Shelley. In Book the Fourth, Cooper twice quotes from the death speech of

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48. Cooper, Op. Cit., Book the Fifth, stanza XXXIX - XLI, p. 172.
49. Ibid., Book the First, stanza, LXXXIII, p. 30.
50. Ibid., Book the Fifth, stanza XXVIII, p. 168.

old Gaunt in Shakespeare's Richard II, and in Book the Eighth, a line from Henry IV, Part II, is also included. The following lines on the prisoner's dreary days :

> Morrow is the heir
> Legitimate of dull To-day; and where
> Yesterday gazed upon the chill damp wall
> And yawned, To-day looks on with the same air
> Of listlessness,[51]

are analogous to Macbeth's famous speech : "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow." The shade of Castlereagh, in Book the Third, tells of the vision of the Radiant Boy who externalizes his inner lusts and, like the three witches in Macbeth, equivocated with him and lured him to fame and power. Lady Macbeth's 'blanket of the dark'[52] may have suggested to our poet the next few lines :

> Darkness! still hold thy provident control
> O'er half man's life, that some thy cloak may wear
> To sin with shame.[53]

Despite all these echoes and influences, or probably because of them, The Purgatory of Suicides fails to lay hold on readers. Cooper is simply unsuccessful in his imitation of Milton's grand style, Shelley's charming lyricism, or Shakespeare's impressive use of imagery. There is a passionate straining after

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51. Ibid., Book the Fourth, stanza XIX, p. 141.
52. Shakespeare, Macbeth, act I, sc. v, l. 54.
53. Cooper, Op. Cit., Book the Fifth, stanza VIII, p. 161.

all these but his attempt, on the whole, dismally flounders. Nevertheless, any attempt to compare Cooper's art with that of Milton, or of Shelley, or of Shakespeare is fraught with dangers, as one can hardly ignore such things as the age in which Cooper wrote, the scanty education he received, and the question of bread-earning that stood before him. Flaws in the artistic expression of a working-class poet like Cooper will not lower his position in working-class poetry, if his untiring crusade against injustice, exploitation, and inequality is given due importance. It is not less gratifying to say that some passages and episodes, characterized with their glowing ardour and natural impulse, can be rescued from amidst the debris.

On the other hand, The Purgatory of Suicides proved also to be Cooper's own purgation of the idea of suicide. Before incarceration, his stand among the workers and in the Chartist Movement was being enhanced by his own relentless efforts on behalf of the poor. Suddenly, he found himself in jail, deprived of all means to contact his supporters outside. Alone, powerless and confined to a small cell like any ordinary felon, the experience naturally had a shattering and depressing effect on him. It led him to muse over the question of life and death and the relative value of each. It is quite possible that his

gloomy thoughts dwelt upon the idea of suicide which, in turn, raised in his mind the spectre of suicide spirits. But the writing of the poem and the vision of the future it pictured provided the necessary healing touch to Cooper's deeply wounded dignity and resotred to him his confidence and belief in a happy future.

In his drive for a revolutionary change, Cooper comes to realize that it is mainly a spiritual awakening. Controlling one's own self is, to him, a moral necessity. The French Revolution failed because of resort to violence. Like Shelley, the Chartist poet comes to believe that only through love, as a transforming force, would a happy and ideal society be established. His object in writing the poem was mainly to inspire men to act and it is this object that runs like an undercurrent throughout the poem. Thus in the final note he stresses the urgency of social struggle. In sharp contrast to the Festival of Brotherhood he has been dreaming of, the poet wakes up to find himself still a captive in his cell :

> The dream o'erwought me to a throe
> Of bliss; and I awoke to find my home
> A dungeon,- thence, to ponder when would come
> The day that Goodness shall the earth renew,
> And Truth's young light disperse old Error's gloom, -
> When Love shall Hate, and Meekness Pride subdue, -
> And when the Many cease their slavery to the Few![54]

54. Ibid., Book the Tenth, stanza CXXVI, p. 361.

CHAPTER V

Ernest Jones : 'A soul like an imprisoned Liberty'

After his expulsion from the Leeds Convention of 1846, Cooper virtually ceased to be a Chartist. The mover of the motion that ousted him was Ernest Jones, the Chartist poet *par excellence*. The latter had a completely different background from that of Cooper's. He was born into an aristocratic family in Berlin, where his father was stationed, in 1819. He studied law and was called to the bar in 1844. Early in 1846 he joined the Chartists and soon after became one of their prominent leading figures, touring the country and lecturing on political and economic topics. Several of his poems were first published in the *Northern Star* and the *Labourer*, and sung at huge Chartist gatherings. For his active role in the Chartist Movement, Jones was arrested in June 1848 and sentenced to two years solitary confinement. In prison, he wrote with his own blood several of his finest poems. When he was set free he became virtually the leader of the movement, for by that time O'Connor was on his way to madness. In May 1851 he started a weekly, *Poems and Notes to the People*. The following year witnessed the publication of his periodical, *The People's Paper*. He was one of the few Chartists who remained faithful to working-class ideals until 1858 when he gave in to the idea of collaboration with middle-class suffragists. In 1861, he moved to Manchester where he became a practising lawyer until his death in January 1869.

Despite his multifarious Chartist activities Jones's poetical output is vast. His poems can be divided into two main groups. The first covers the years 1846-48. The second comprises poems written during the period of his incarceration and after.

In 1846, and shortly after joining the Chartist Movement, Jones wrote in his diary, "I am pouring the tide of my songs over England, forming the tone of the mighty mind of the people."[1] And that was no exaggeration. Jones was of passionate nature; he was not a man to do things by halves. Joining Chartism meant that he threw himself wholeheartedly into the main stream of public agitation. And his poems, in this period, are mainly agitational in nature. They cover a wide range of topics and are also lyrical and simple in diction as well as in ideas and techniques. Jones was writing for the ordinary man in the street and intentionally attempted to convey no more to the simple minded than can be taken in on one reading or hearing. Some of these poems, such as "The Blackstone-Edge Gathering" and "A Song for the people," were written to the tune of popular airs or songs.

Like other popular songs and ballads, Jones's poems are repetitive and extremely parallelistic in design. They

1. Diary, October 6, 1846; quoted in John Saville, p. 20.

are, generally speaking, simple in their meaning and artistic build-up. "Our Summons", for example, is particularly concerned with the labourers and workers. It reflects the poet's awareness that the struggle against the upper classes is painful and entails heavy sacrifices. Its aim is to stir up the toilers and infuse them with enthusiasm to press for their rights :

> Ye labourers in the vineyard,
> We call you to your toil!
> Though bleak may be the furrows,
> The seed is in the soil.[2]

The poem is written in regular quatrains with a rhyme-scheme similar to that of popular songs. Repetition and parallelism are resorted to in order to underline the poet's message and drive it home. The regular beat of the rhythm is drum-like and heart-assuring :

> Men of the honest heart,
> Men of the stalwart hand,
> Men, willing to obey,
> Thence able to command.[3]

In an attempt to arouse the oppressed men of England from their apathy, Jones reminds them, in "Our Cheer," of their glorious past and gives expression to sentiments similar to those of Wordsworth's in his sonnet 'London 1802" :

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2. Northern Star, May 16, 1846; quoted in Povalev, p. 135.
3. Ibid.

My Countrymen! why languish
Like outcasts of the earth,
And drown in tears of anguish
The glory of your birth?
Ye were a free-born people
And heroes were your race:
The dead, they are our freeman,
The living —— our disgrace![4]

Other poems, such as "A Chartist Song" and "Our Warning," are outright attacks on 'crown, cross, and sabre' as well as on merchants, peers and members of Parliament. The Latter poem, reveals the illusory hope cherished by the vast majority of the Chartists, in both wings of the Movement, that the rulers may listen to their grievances and yield to their just demands. However, being no pacifist, Jones ends his poem with a forewarning of the wrath to come :

And the anger of the nation
Across the land shall sweep,
Like a mighty Devastation
Of the winds upon the deep![5]

The quatrain is worthy of admiration for the vigour it radiates as well as for its defiant and strutting rhythm. The poet's use of plosives and affricates, particularly in the opening and closing stanzas adds a flinty, unyielding hardness and a pervasive abruptness to the poem's rhythm.

Unlike many other Chartist poets, Jones was endowed with a sense of humour. In "The Royal Bounty", for example,

4. Northern Star, August 8, 1846; quoted in Kovalev, p. 139.
5. Northern Star, August 1, 1846; quoted in Kovalev, p. 139.

he makes fun of the Queen who, as the poet tells us, feels one morning conscience-pricked and orders the Lord Steward to give the hungry paupers, sarcastically contrasted with the overfed royal hounds, the crumbs of bread and meat left over by her majesty. Irony and sarcasm are underlined and sharpened with the use of internal rhyme. Mockery is cleverly handled in the picture of the benignant queen, 'with a pleasant face,' and raillery, too, in the Lord Steward hacking the joint. The poem ends with a pointed parable and piercingly bitter irony :

> A story is told of a traveller bold
> Whom being in want of food,
> Cut off and ate the tail of his hound,
> Returned him the bone, and strangely found
> The brute had no gratitude! 6

Not all of Jones's poems in this early period are short; some of them are rather long and contemplative. "The Factory Town", republished with a few drastic changes in The Battle-Day and Other Poems (1855), consists of thirty-six quatrains and is an admirable piece of poetry. It was first published in The Labourer (1847), co-edited by both O'Connor and Jones. The former had earlier devised his Land Plan, a Utopian scheme giving concrete expression to the back-to-land movement advocated by some early nineteenth-century radicals who strongly reacted

6. The Labourer (1847), vol. I, p. 238; quoted in Kovalev, p. 149.

to the horrors emanating from industrialisation in a capitalist society. Jones, at the time, was a great admirer and passionate supporter of the then all-powerful Chartist leader and his Land Plan. "The Factory Town" undoubtedly helped to add strength and ammunition to the idea. It forcefully contrasts the filthy life of the workers in the town and the dehumanising effects of the machine on men and children with the healing power of nature in the country. Vivid images are used to describe the factories and their inmates :

> The factories gave forth lurid fires
> From pent-up hells within their breast;
> E'en ÆTna's burning wrath expires,
> But man's volcanoes never rest.
>
> Women, children, men were toiling,
> Locked in dungeons close and black,
> Life's fast-failing thread uncoiling
> Round the wheel, the modern rack![7]

The compound image of factories giving forth smoke and fire can be interpreted in more than one way. First, factories are being compared with hells. Second, the workers within are being used as fuel for factories. Furthermore, the 'pent-up hells', which can also be linked with the 'wrath' of the third line, implicitly and threateningly conveys the angry but suppressed feelings of the workers. The image of the worker's life described as a 'fast-failing thread uncoiling/ Round the wheel'

7. The Labourer, 1847, vol. I, p. 49; quoted in Kovalev, p. 141.

is original and deeply effective. This horrid picture of industrialised towns is contrasted, towards the end of the poem, with what would happen in the future when men and women will have their free will and return to the land.

In the factory and despite the hardships experienced by the 'hands', the master is greedy, callous and indifferent; to him, they are mere machines. To the foreign visitors of his factory, he proudly and insensibly points out :

"These are men —— and engines those ——"
"I see nothing but —— machines!" 8

The dry and flat words used here fit in with the down-to-earth and business-like, brisk manner of the factory-owner. But a sentimental note makes its entry in the poem with the hackneyed image of the town-dweller's despairing for water and longing for the freshening breeze on the meadows and fields. A romantic and nostalgic touch of the peasants' life is also deeply felt and conveyed in :

though 'twas night of summer
With a scent of new mown hay
From where the moon, the fairies' summer,
On distant fields enchanted lay! 9

The soft dancing rhythm, created through the repeated use of

8. Ibid., p. 142.
9. Ibid.

liquids and nasals, contrasts sharply with the harsh, rough rhythm prevalent in the earlier part of the poem. Words like 'summer', 'mummer', 'mown' and 'moon' have indeed a mesmeric and charming effect, which really endows the country with the power to lull and heal. The soft and lulling rhythm changes again and acquires a drum-like quality in such exhortative stanzas, as in :

> Up in factory! Up in mill!
> Freedom's mighty phalanx swell!
> You have God and Nature still
> What have they, but Gold and Hell.[10]

To the toilers and the oppressed, the poem holds out the hope in the future when 'liberty will banish crime' and prisons will be done away with. In those happy days, the rich, with their servile dependants, will vanish. Fleets will still be in use not for war but for trade with overseas countries. Art will continue to have its votaries but it will satisfy the needs not of the few but of all the people. Peace will prevail and war-machines will be turned into peaceful tools :

> And cannon, bayonet, sword, and shield,
> The implements of murder's trade,
> Shall furrow deep the fertile field,
> Converted into hoe and spade! [11]

It is a prophetic picture that looks forward to the more

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10. Ibid., p. 144.
11. Ibid., p. 145.

expanded one in The Revolt of Hindostan.

In his exhortation to the people to rise against their oppressors, Jones's sentiments are strikingly similar to those of Shelley, as expressed in The Mask of Anarchy in which the latter says :

> 'With folded arms and steady eyes,
> And little fear, and less surprise,
> Look upon them as they slay
> Till their rage has died away'.
> (Mask of Anarchy, stanza LXXV)

These lines find their echo in Jones's poem, in which the Chartist poet urges the people to unite :

> Fear ye not your master's power;
> Men are strong when men unite;
> Fear ye not one stormy hour:
> Banded millions need not fight.[12]

Such a conception, held by a militant Chartist like Jones, sounds rather surprising to the reader.[13] But Jones here is undoubtedly influenced by an earlier tradition established by English radicals. In his discussion of Shelley's Mask of Anarchy, Carl Woodring comments :

> Radical leaders did in fact follow this perpetually inconclusive method of implying the threat of numbers without preparing to man barricades, probably

12. Ibid., p. 144. (Italics in the original)
13. It is noticeable that the text of the poem, as reprinted in the Battle-Day and other Poems is somewhat changed. This stanza, with a few others, is omitted.

because they shared Shelley's belief in
the rights of Englishmen under law.[14]

The poem, at the end, is given a definitely Chartist turn :

Then up, in one united band,
Both farming slave and factory-martyr!
Remember, that, to keep the LAND,
The best way is — to gain the CHARTER![15]

Such a poem makes strong claims for its creator and such sentiments, to borrow Mrs Shelley's comments on the blessed effects of liberty, as described in The Mask of Anarchy, 'might make a patriot of any man whose heart was not wholly closed against his humble fellow creatures'.[16]

"Onward" is another poem that reveals marked traces of Shelley's influence on Jones. It includes a variation on the Romantic poet's famous line in The Mask of Anarchy : 'Ye are many — they are few'. The poem is a strong and sweeping attack on kings, nobles, priests as well as on the half-hearted supporters of the cause of the working class. The forceful determination of the forces of progress is echoed and reflected in the words, rhythm, rhyme, metre, images and structure of the whole poem, as in :

Go bid the eagle clip its wing!
Go bid the tempest cease to sing,
And streams to burst, and tides to spring;

14. Carl Woodring, Op. cit., p. 264.
15. Op. cit., p. 145. (Italics in the original).
16, Shelley's Poetical Works, 1970, p. 345.

And, should they listen to your call,
We'll onward still, and face you all![17]

The lines, a microcosm of the whole poem, have force and energy. The rhythm is suitably that of a battering-ram. The sound admirably conveys the poet's message of insistence, persistence and determination. The verbal parallelism resorted to is neither lavishly used nor overdone; it is justified by the serious weightiness of the content.

In June 1848, Jones was arrested, put on trial and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. In jail and like other Chartist prisoners, he was subjected to harsh treatment. For nineteen months he was denied books and writing materials. However, he secretly managed to write some of his finest poems on the leaves of a Bible and a prayer-book, the only books he was allowed to keep. The poems he wrote during his incarceration and after, and which belong to his second period, are usually longer and essentially graver, more argumentative and contemplative.

Some of these poems are really impressive for their lyricism, on the one hand, and for their sentiments, on the other. In "Prison Bars", for example, the strong, unvanquishable will of the prisoner and his determination to persevere in the

17. The Labourer, 1847, vol. II, p. 1; quoted in Kovalev, p. 150.

cause of the people are admirably conveyed. With resolve, patience and aspiration he claims that he, like the modern Greeks in Byron's The Island, who turn chains into swords, will be able to forge his new armour and strike his foes with the very prison bars encircling him.

Jones's poems are frequently studded with impressive images borrowed from nature, which is presented in many cases in juxtaposition with man. Like Shelley, his nature images include volcanoes, wind, glaciers, snow and running water. Almost all these images are brilliantly manipulated and admirably used in the following lines from "We Are Silent" :

> All in silence glides the larva (sic)
> Thro' its veins of red-hot ore;
> All in silence lightnings gather
> Round the mountain's glacier hoar;
> Weight on weight, and all in silence
> Swells the avalanche's snow,
> Till a scarce-heard whisper hurls it
> Crushing on the world below;
>
> Drop by drop, and all in silence,
> At their mound the waters grow,
> Till the last wave proves too heavy,
> And away the barriers go![18]

The images of the lava, lightnings, the avalanche and the waters aptly convey the poet's meaning. Their accumulation and the repetition of phrases like, 'All in silence', and words

18. Notes to the People (1851), vol. I, p. 92.

as in 'Weight on weight' and 'Drop by drop', add emphasis and underline the idea of the patience as well as the determination of the people in order to achieve their revolutionary aims. The slow rhythm, along with the trochaic metre, is in harmony with the meaning and suitably echoes the stealthy steps of the popular movement quietly mustering its forces. These lines succeed in indirectly conveying the sense of the growing power of the people and assuredly hold out the hope of emancipation to the oppressed masses. They can favourably be compared with W.B. Yeats's "The Second Coming", which is undeniably richer and more complex in meaning. The main difference between the two poets is that the one fervently expresses his hope in future upheavals, doing away with oppression and establishing equality and justice, while the other is frightened with the prospects of a second coming, when the 'rough beast' 'Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born'.

Under the general title, "The Poet", Jones grouped together some of the poems written in jail and included them, among others, in his vooume of poetry, The Battle-Day and Other Poems (1855). "The Poet's Parallel", the second in this cycle of poems, is allegorical. It describes a river which, in its running course, meets with obstacles and adversaries, but it is also befriended by flowers, birds, deer and fairies. The

river is obviously a symbol for the bard. However, the similarity is only hinted at in the title of the poem.

But this lovely poem is unfortunately vitiated with a streak of sentimentality, apparent in the repetition of 'Oh!' Yet its rhythm is melodious and pleasing to the ear. It opens on a happy dancing note :

> Down the hillside tripping brightly,
> O'er the pebble tinkling lightly,
> 'Mid the meadows rippling merrily, the
> mountain-current goes.[19]

With the introduction of the river's adversary forces, the merry note changes to a sorrowful one and the rhythm slows down. But the poem ends on a serene joyful note :

> And the glory of the skies
> That the blind earth idly eyes,
> Fills the Pulse of thy being with the fullness
> of its light.[20]

Jones's power to humanize Nature and endows its diverse phenomena with human characteristics is clearly manifested in this poem. The river and its foes and friends are all treated in terms of human beings. The images, though not original, are admirably drawn and undoubtedly enhance the poem's beauty, as in :

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19. The Battle-Day and Other Poems, London, 1855, p. 123.
20. Ibid., p. 125.

Oh! the stormy wind that mars
The image of the stars
When they nestle, heavenly lovers! on their earthly
wooer's breast! 21

The poet's humanizing power can also be seen in the next poem, "The Poet's Prayer to the Evening Wind", which beyond any doubt is an imitation of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind". The first three stanzas, in Jones's poem, are mainly taken up with the wind and its omnipotent manifestations in dissolving clouds and driving years to their end, as the first of poets and an eternal song, and as the preserver of life in ocean, air and earth. With the second half of stanza three, a personal note is introduced in the poem. The poet appeals to the wind to teach him to sing both softly and tempestuously, to be *fetterless and free, to cull songs and sing them.* The poem reaches its climax in stanza six with the poet achieving, in death, complete union with the wind.

Several symbolical meanings could be read in this poem. The wind is described as having the power to dissolve clouds into mist, rain or sleet and drive years to their death; it therefore becomes a symbol of change or mutability. Second, it is referred to as the first of poets as well as an eternal song; thus it stands for both Poet and Poetry. Hence arises *the affinity between the wind and the writer of the poem.*

21. Ibid., p. 124.

He wants it to help him to be free and fetterless. As such it becomes the symbol of liberty and revolution.

The poem at a deeper level represents Jones's profound response to his imprisonment. The first three stanzas reveal the character of the wind as simultaneously a destroyer and a preserver of life. Without the effects of the wind on the sea, air and earth, life would stagnate. It also has a liberting influence on the poet himself. It would teach him to sing freely and discard his fetters. In death, the poet achieves the supreme power of being completely united to the wind; he becomes an integral part of it. In this very act of annihilation he becomes as powerful and omnipotent as the wind itself. Read in this light, the poem becomes an act of heroic defiance directed at the tyrants who put him in jail.

It is obvious that there is striking similarity between Jones's poem and Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind". Here Jones is not only echoing Shelley but also imitating and closely following in the footsteps of the great Romantic poet. Consequently he heavily depends on his model and borrows from it. However, the dialectic unity of Shelley's poem, reflected in its images and metaphors, as well as between the rigid structure and the violent uncontrollable wind, cannot be matched by Jones. Furthermore, the latter's poem does not

follow any obvious plan and is weak in structure.

Like Thomas Hood, Ernest Jones was so immersed in popular and folk traditions that he was able to produce some of the finest verses. His "Song of the Low" (1852), republished in December 1856 under the title "The Song of the Lower Classes", was very popular among the working classes. It was written in imitation of the popular ballad. The refrain piercingly reflects the deep misery of the poor and their pathetic conditions :

> We're low —— we're low —— we're very, very low
> As low as low can be. 22

But the poem is also ironic and the irony is sharp and poignant, as in :

> We're not too low —— the bread to grow
> But too low the bread to eat. 23

It reflects the realization of the poor that their toil is the source of all wealth. It is the peasants who 'bless the plain with the golden grain' and the miners who 'gather the proudest gems that glow,/ When the crown of a despot shines'. It is the workers who build 'palace and church and tower' and weave silken robes for the rich to wear. They also constitute

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22. Notes to the People, vol. II, p. 953.
23. Ibid., p. 953.

the rank and file of the army that courageously defends the country against her foes.

The technique of contrast and counterpoint, as in the art of balladry, is the main axis upon which the poem revolves. A series of antitheses is held between the rich and the poor, the peasants and the landlords, the miners and the monarch, and between the workers and 'the sons of pride'. To drive its lesson home, the poem cleverly uses the device of repetition, as in the examples given before. This is cemented with the repetition in the rhythm, internal rhyme, metre and alliteration. To this quality the poem owes its power of appeal as well as to its emotionally heightened language.

While in prison Jones also wrote his longest and one of his best poems, The Revolt of Hindostan, or The New World. It is said that it was written almost entirely with his own blood while denied access to writing materials. It was first published in Notes to the People, volume I, in 1851. The Indian mutiny of 1857 prompted Jones to republish his poem in a book form. Against the background of an Indian uprising, similar in a way to Shelley's treatment of the French Revolution in The Revolt of Islam, the general plan of Jones's poem runs parallel to that of Queen Mab in drawing a picture of past historical developments, in surveying the present and in

predicting the future.

The latter part of the poem might also have been inspired by Shelley's 'Lines Written among the Euganean Hills". Shelley's poem tells of a mariner who, in spite of gales and storms, perseveres in his efforts to reach a green isle and whose boat is one morning piloted by the soft winds to a flowering island. The concluding section of the same poem also maintains that there must be many green islands 'In the sea of Life and Agony'. The poet hopes to be able to find refuge and happiness on one of these isles and to be joined by other people in order to gain purification of their evil thoughts and desires. In short, the poem is another of Shelley's dreams of the golden age of mankind when the earth will grow young again and love and brotherhood will be revered and upheld by all. Jones's poem too envisions the future establishment of a republic of federated isles. The last few lines in his poem refer to the whole work in terms of a voyage undertaken by the poet/ mariner who arrives at a new world founded on Shelley's same ideals.

Moreover, Jones's vision of the future is, in a way, akin to that temporarily embraced by Tennyson, as briefly illustrated in 'Locksley Hall", in which the future Poet Laureate says :

> For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
> Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be; ...
> the war-drum throbb'd no longer and the battle flags were furl'd
> In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.
> There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
> And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.
>
> (Tennyson: Poems and Plays, O.U.P., 1968, p. 94).

Following the lead of such radicals as Paine and Shelley,[24] the Chartist poet, in the opening of his poem, hails America as the land of freedom and, in the same breath, shrewdly warns her of the future and advises her to learn of past history. Touching on slavery in America, Jones rightly remarks that both the white and the black are the preys of gold and steel kings. He warns the young republic of following the path of war and colonization.

Greece and Rome are fleetingly referred to and praised for their institutions, but not for their military conquests. The poet's thoughts, then, dwell for a while on India and her struggle against her northern and foreign invaders. The British colonizers, with their fleet and gospel, come in for some sharp and sarcastic remarks. Afterwards the poet sweepingly reviews the history of the world and singles out the unholy alliance between Monarchy and Church. Feudal rivalry between king and noblemen is also described. In place

24. See, for example, The Revolt of Islam, Canto XI, stanzas 22-24.

of the defeated king, the feudal Lords grasp the reigns of power in their hands. But the people's conditions do not change; they remain crushed and oppressed. Gradually the middle class grows in wealth, strength and power. Of the three-headed hydra, one, i.e. that of the kind, is chopped off. The other two, those of the lords and of the middle class, await their turn. In the conflict which ensues between the two, victory goes to the middle class. But the people's misery remains basically unreprieved. The oppressed come to realize that it was only a change of tyrants. The picture of the past and the present is that of an age of war, exploitation and corruption, of poverty, hypocrisy and hatred. The contemporary scene in Britain is treated with bitter irony. Democracy, the poet says, is turned into a mockery. But the mighty millions close their ranks and rise against their oppressors who flee away in terror. In the colonies all over the world, people violently rise in arms and apply the lesson they learnt from their colonizers. At last, mankind is emancipated. Man and woman, the strong and the weak, come to share their rights equally. A republic of federated isles is founded. Peace and mercy prevail. Evil is overcome and love becomes sole guide to man. Heaven and earth merge into one another. Thus the New World is reached and the poet's voyage or expedition is completed.

In his survey of the world history Jones shows signs of perspicacity and, as in his fiction writings, his attitude towards the social groups, classes and organizations is revealed. Kingship and priestcraft are referred to as 'the twinborn asp'. Monarchy, feudalism and the middle classes are described as a 'three-headed hydra'. When the king grows weak, the poet says, the feudal lords prove faithless, greedy and ambitious. They thrive on and manipulate, for their own narrow and selfish interests, the discontent of the people. They seize upon and head the revolt against the king by claiming that they would improve the people's conditions. But to their discomfiture, the people find out that :

> No more one lion mouth their vitals tears -
> But thousand wolves dispute their mangled shares.[25]

The harshest criticism, in Jones's arsenals, is preserved for the middle class or the nouveaux riches. Honesty is laughed at, according to the poem, 'By flippant meanness of the merchant-born'. The British army generals, sent to India, are mentally mercantile and corrupt. When the feudal system is overthrown and replaced by that of the middle class, the people's hunger is not allayed nor are their conditions radically changed. Under the capitalist system, wrongs

25. The Revolt of Hindostan, Calcutta, 1957, p. 23.

accumulate. Ridicule and serious scorn is used to castigate the new rulers, who like jugglers, benefit in times of prosperity as well as from disasters. And with bitter sarcasm, the writer describes the parties held by members of the aristocracy :

> In gilded halls the tears of - laughter glance,
> And gaily twirls the patriotic dance! 26

When the people complain, they are terrorized and cowed into silence. A class society, the poet maintains, is bedevilled by enmity and war :

> With humble names their strongholds they conceal:
> Jail, prison, workhouse, barrack and bastile.
> Beggar and vagrant there they hold secure,
> Through that long battle of the rich and poor;
> Struck down by Want, and marked by Hunger's scar,
> PAUPERS they call those Prisoners of War! 27

When there is famine or a natural disaster occurs, these middle-class men shirk their responsibility and put the blame at others' door. In their attempt to suppress and subdue the people, even religion is manipulated by them :

> "If famine scourges, and if bread is high,
> 'Tis God! 'tis God Himself's the cause!" they cry.
> - - - - - -
> "Did we the harvest blight? the increase stay? 28
> "To church, to church! you sinners?" fast and pray!"

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26. Ibid., p. 26.
27. Ibid., p. 31.
28. Ibid., p. 32.

Behind the rhetorical repetitions in these lines, one can actually feel the author's sour sneer or see a grim smile on his face.

The contemporary scene in Britain comes also under attack. Nothing is spared; Crown, Church, Parliament, the judiciary and the police are all sarcastically assailed. Democracy, the poet maintains, has become a hollow word :

> The judge decides from high judicial seat,
> The right to speak, petition, and to meet:
> "To meet - in every public space, no doubt!
> "If the police don't choose to keep you out.
> "If at such meeting you may chance to be,
> "And some one something says to somebody,
> "Though not one syllable you may have heard,
> "You're guilty, all the same, of every word!
> "You may petition, if you like, the Throne -
> "But then the ministers decide alone;
> "Or Parliament - and if they won't attend,
> "What would you more? - the matter's at an end!"[29]

The democratic rights of public meetings, making public speeches, and submitting petitions are recognised, only to be negated or nullified in one and the same breath. The passage is a formidable attack on the so-called liberalism of the West.

In the same poem, the public prosecutor is also subjected to one of the most virulent attacks :

> In him is centred all that perfects knaves -
> The heart of tyrants, and the soul of slaves;

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29. Ibid., p. 27.

A Bishop's sophistry, a bigot's ire,
A lawyer's conscience, and a brain for hire.[30]

The language is bold and vigorous, and the combinations in tyrants and slaves, bishop and bigot, and the lawyer and his hired brains sharpen the attack and make it vividly remembered.

The conflict between the landlords and capitalists, the enclosure movement, the game laws, the anti-Corn Law movement, the plundering of workers by industrialists - all these topics find their way into the poem. The hungry forties are also made a special reference to and Jones sarcastically contrasts the people's misery with the expensive parties and festivals held in the guilded halls of the rich and with the luxury enjoyed by the Queen. In answer to the policy of emigration propagated by the ruling classes at the time, Jones holds that if action is to be taken, it should be against the unproductive members of society.

For the Church and her clergy, Jones has nothing but contempt. The priest who is supposed to devote himself, soul and body, to spiritual and divine ideals, is depicted by the poet as one of 'Mammon's favourite twins'; the other being the lawyer. The bishop, hindered on his flight from rebelling Indians by the treasure he carries, asks for forgiveness and the

30. Ibid., p. 27.

poet ironically adds :

> In ransom pledges future worlds of bliss.[31]

Priestcraft is branded as a tool in the hands of Kings, upholding and propagating their so-called divine rights. The two institutions, i.e. Monarchy and Church, work hand in hand, and, in the name of God, put down resistance to the corrupt and decaying system. On the eve of the people's revolution, when corruption reaches its highest and foullest point and while Mammon recklessly and desperately defends the status quo, the priest, more cunningly, tries to appease the angry and restless and holds out to them the hope in the life to come :

> The Priest, more timid, pours fresh floods of lies,
> And doubly liberal grows - of Paradise!
> "In pain and poverty contented rest!
> "Whom God chastises most, He loves the best.
> "Nor envy those to worldly treasures given:
> "Leave earth to them, and take your share - in heaven![32]

The passage is a powerful combination of invective, parody and devastating sarcasm; it admirably arouses both laughter and hate.

Jones's stand on religion is never blandly stated. Unlike Thomas Cooper in his Chartist heyday, he does not give utterance to atheistic or agnostic convictions. On the contrary, his pose is that of a believer. However, the

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31. Ibid., p. 11.
32. Ibid., p. 12.

following lines, from the Revolt of Hindostan, reveal that his religion is that of Man and Freedom :

> Man is the Temple, Truth the corner stone,
> Freedom the worship, worthy God alone;
> Rent is the veil, Deception's darkling art,
> Holy of holies is the human heart. 33

How a revolutionary change is to come about or be effected is a question that continually crops up in Jones's writings. As a leader of the Chartist Movement, he was particularly concerned with it. In his fiction, passages from The Confessions of A King and De Brassier show the more realistic attitude of the need for organised armed resistance as a means of overthrowing the old system. But in The Revolt of Hindostan, he leans towards Shelley's, and other radicals', idea of non-violence. The message conveyed in the poem is that by the mere show of the people's strength, their class enemies would give in and flee the battlefield :

> They marched unarmed - yet no one dared resist:
> Camps, courts and councils melted like a mist. 34

Shelley's conception of evil, too, had probably had its impact on the Chartist poet. In Prometheus Unbound, Shelley differentiates between two kinds of evil : one is objective and ineradicable, and the other subjective and deeply based. In other

33. Ibid., p. 40.
34. Ibid., p. 34.

words, man according to Shelley is prone to physical and moral evils. Man's subjective or moral evil makes him open to objective or physical evil, i.e. diseases and natural disasters.[35] A similar conception of physical and moral evils finds its echo in The Revolt of Hindostan, in which Jones maintains that in the liberated future and when man is able to purify himself from his moral vices, the fight against physical evil will be made easier :

> Then each disease shall quit the lightened breast,
> By pain tormented while by vice oppressed;
> And life's faint step to Death's cool threshold seem
> The gentle passing of a pleasant dream. 36

With the rise of the peoples of Europe against their oppressors and the peoples in the colonies against their colonizers, the way to establish a new society is opened. It takes the shape of a republic of federated isles. Under the new circumstances, Jones, like Cooper, says that science will grow in importance and power. In this respect, Jones's portrait is endowed with greater accuracy and deeper insight. His knowledge of science and scientific inventions widens the scope of the poet's scene of commentary and comes as a surprise to the modern reader. With scientific expertise, he says,

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35. On this point, see Melvin Rader's "Shelley's Theory of Evil" in G.M. Ridenour's Shelley : A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 105, and P.M.S. Dawson's The Unacknowledged Legislator, pp. 123-24.
36. Op.Cit., p. 41.

clouds will be driven away or moved from one place to another. Health will be administered to and wealth increased. Even the modern phenomenon of air flights and space exploration is referred to or at least prophetically implied. Knowledge, the poet believes, will be unfettered to explore the mystery of man and his life. Superstition in the past misguided man in his attempt to uncover certain truths. But in the future and with the maturing knowledge and growing virtue of man, he will be enabled to know more about other planets and stars :

> Then shall the eye, with wide extended sight,
> Translate the starry gospel of the night;
> And not as now, when narrower bounds are set,
> See, but not read the shining alphabet. 37

The soundness of Jones's thoughts has been borne out by scientific discoveries and inventions since his time.

Godwin's egalitarian state, with the mind reigning supreme, finds its echo in Jones's future society. Mankind, as one big family, will live in peace and harmony, says Jones. Christ's love will be the only law to guide man and judge him with. Man will be freed from 'soldiers, nobles, Kings, Priests, lawyers, hangmen, and all worthless things'. Equality will be the foundation of the new society and exploitation will be done away with. Private ownership is also termed a 'theft' by the poet:

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37. Ibid., p. 41.

God gave to man his title in his toil:
No vile distinctions mar His great design,
And designate a theft as "mine and thine":
No perjured code shall make His bounty vain,
And say : "for thee the stubble — me, the grain" —
But, 'twixt this dust and heaven's o'er-arching span,
Man own no nobler name than that of MAN. 38

Jones's portrait of a future society is similar to Cooper's, for both poets owed their allegiance to the Charter and upheld the ideas of freedom, equality, peace and love. But Jones's is more realistic and less abstract than that of Cooper's. It also reminds the reader of another fictional work on the same topic. William Morris, who wrote his News From Nowhere more than forty years later, unfortunately did not show such consciousness of the importance of science and its application in different fields. The absence of machines from Morris's book drove some critics to the wrong conclusion that the veteran socialist poet and artist was against industrialization and the use of machines. However, Morris's rural and paradisiac community sharply differs from that of Jones's.

The Revolt of Hindostan is also noticeably written in heroic couplets and the question immediately arises : why did Jones choose to write it in this form? The answer, I believe, lies in the fact that the poem, with its dignified theme of surveying the past, the present and foreseeing the future,

38. Ibid., p. 42.

with its opening invocation to America and the brief war scenes included, can be classified as an epic in miniature, and the heroic couplet had been regarded, mainly since the eighteenth century, as a suitable vehicle for epic verse in English, celebrating heroic exploits. Second, Jones, as a Victorian, was moving away from romanticism and groping for a realistic approach to his theme. On the other hand, working-class readers were more interested in a literature which presented their life and problems realistically than in romantic poetry dealing with weird, supernatural and mystifying experiences of nature. Third, the meaning in the heroic couplet is usually explicit or on the surface, unlike that of a metaphysical or a romantic poem which is often implicit, obscure and complex, and conveyed by the totality of impressions created. And our poet, who was also a prominent Chartist leader, was aware that his readers were mostly working men who would find it easier to follow the meaning of a couplet than of a verse-paragraph. Fourth, the heroic couplet with its regular rhyme and rhythm came very near to echoing the throbbing beat of the multitudes. Moreover, it is a form of extraordinary compression and terse compactness which fitfully gives punch to Jones's satirical thrust at different social classes, groups and individuals.

It is a fact that the rhyming lines of the heroic couplet make it very appropriate to argument, for the rhymes lend emphasis to particular points and help lead up to some telling conclusion. And this technique is cleverly used by Jones. In his comment on colonial wars, it could be seen how poetry compresses and concentrates and how balance reinforces the poet's argument :

> The interest's —blood; the capital is — life;
> The debt — is vengeance; the instalment — strife;
> The payment's —death; and wounds are the receipt
> The market's — battle; and the whole — a cheat. 39

The mercantile terminology is intentionally used here, as a running commentary on the mentality of the colonizers. Each line is neatly split in two and further subdivided by a pause or caesura.

The argument or idea posed by the poet is also enhanced by the fact that the lines are arranged in pairs, so that the idea expressed in one line can be further stressed, developed and made more vivid through contrast in the pair-line, as in :

> Within the mansion, banquet, rouse, and rout;
> Rags and starvation in the street without. 40

Gravity, strength and succinctness are admirably conveyed in the brief description of the popular revolution. The ongoing,

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39. Ibid., p. 13.
40. Ibid., p. 26.

beating rhythm fitfully echoes the rising power of the people :

> Nor cheered, nor shouted that majestic force,
> It moved, it acted, like a thing of course;
> No blood, no clamour, no tumultuous hate;
> As death invincible, and calm as fate! [41]

For brevity and perspecuity, contrast and balance, the following line stands witness on Jones's artistic powers :

> Blaspheming altar, crime-cemented throne.[42]

Sometimes the rhythm aptly goes hand in hand with the thought, as in the portait of a British general, defeated by the rebelling Indians, leaving him very little space for manoeuvre. As a result, he has either to slink away cowardly or to fight to the last and valiantly die in the execution of his shameful mission :

> Meanly to fly, or manfully to fall :
> Courageous died that white-haired general![43]

The heroic couplet is also regarded as an appropriate form for epigarms. The whole point about the epigram is its ability to express something wittily and surprisingly, that on reflection we perfectly concur in or agree with. And Jones's poem is also studded with several epigrams, simple, pointed and truthful. The following examples give an idea about his sharp

41. Ibid., p. 34.
42. Ibid., p. 2.
43. Ibid., p. 10.

wit and clever use of the device :

> For they soon walk too slow, who run too fast,[44]

and, with a touch of Popean grandeur :

> Nations buy wisdom with the coin of years
> And write the book of history with their tears.[45]

The metaphors included in the last quotation are beyond the power of a mere versifier and show that Jones is worthy of a better place among nineteenth-century English poets.

The Revolt of Hindostan is Jones's reaction to the social realities around him sharpened by his shattering experience in jail. It is an angry and bitter cry of an imprisoned Chartist who tries to penetrate into the future. Unable to enter into the spirit of the poem, the unsympathetic reader will see mainly faults. But the sympathetic reader, on the contrary, will find several passages which are powerful and worthy of admiration.

It is not irrelevant here to draw a comparison between Ernest Jones and Rudyard Kipling. Both were political writers and both resorted to popular airs and songs to compose several of their poems. But a sharp difference between the two is immediately spotted out. On the one hand, Jones wrote from a

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44. Ibid., p. 19.
45. Ibid., p. 34.

radical perspective to defend the rights and interests of the British working class and of the oppressed everywhere in the world. He was a member of the Fraternal Democrats whose membership consisted mainly of European emigrés residing in London, and through which he met Marx and Engels. Some of his public speeches were made at annual meetings held by the French Democratic Society, the German Democratic Society and the Democratic Committee for Poland's Regeneration. He was selected, along with G.J. Harney and Philip McGrath, to go to Paris in March 1848 to present a joint address from the Chartists and the Fraternal Democrats, congratulating the Provisional Government and the French people on the success of their revolution. Some of his poems, such as "The March of Freedom" (1848), are entirely devoted to the cause of liberty in Europe, in general, and in Italy, Poland, Hungary and France, in particular. Jones's poems, written mainly in ballad forms, were sung by the workers in the streets, on moors and at huge Chartist gatherings. Kipling, on the other hand, was a strong defender of the idea of colonial domination. He in fact wrote as the spokesman of British imperialism and firmly believed in Britain's civilising mission. His best poetry is both self-expression and public affirmation of his belief in the Empire and what it stood for. Even in his portraits of common soldiers, he depicts them as essential

components of the imperial machinery whose sole role was to keep the colonies under British control. In some of his popular poems, he closely imitated the heroic ballad and broadside forms.[46] He created The Barrack-Room Ballads out of the songs of the music hall, as he himself admitted.[47] In brief, the former was a Chartist and an internationalist holding up the banner of the exploited the world over; the latter was a Tory and a racialist believing in the white man's supremacy.[48] The one is condemned to obscurity and left undisturbed to rest there while the other's fame is bolstered up every now and then.

Jones's poems are certainly undervalued, largely because he wrote radical and public poetry. In our own times, readers are so used to the idea that poetry is a means of self-revelation and introspection that they deprecate the poetry of public values. It is difficult nowadays to evaluate a poet writing exclusively in the popular tradition and attempting to voice the responses of the average man. The standards of current criticism do not seem to be applicable.

Ernest Jones was of a passionate nature and a fiery mind. In his poem, "The Poet's Death", he is full of praise of the

46. J.S. Bratton, The Victorian Popular Ballad, Macmillan, 1975, pp. 75-88.
47. R. Kipling, Something of Myself, Bombay Edition of the Works of Rudyard Kipling, 31 vols, (1913-38), vol.XXXI, pp. 95-6.
48. See, for example, his poem, "The White Man's Burden" (1899), in T.S. Eliot's A Choice of Kipling's Verse, Faber and Faber, 1976, p. 136.

militant poet whose soul is like 'an imprisoned Liberty', and the description can aptly apply to Jones himself. In his early Chartist period, his ideas and techniques were deliberately simple and agitational. He wanted his poetry to appeal to the ordinary man in the street and impress upon him the need to reject the contemporary system. For this main reason, several of his verses were written in imitation of popular tunes and airs and the ballad form proved, in his case, to be most pliable and effective. Repetition and parallelism are two characteristics of this kind of poetry and they were instrumental in emphasizing the values he wished to convey to his working-class readers as well as in his castigation of the upper and middle classes. His sense of humour helped to mitigate the gravity of his ideas and made them more presentable and appreciated. But a streak of sentimentality runs through some of his poems and vitiates them.

In his latter period, Jones's poetry became graver, more argumentative and contemplative. His identification with the workers, which earlier on was still in its tentative stage, was completed. The 'ye' of the first period changed to 'we' in the second. His imitation of popular ballad forms reached its highest and best point in "The Song of the Lower Classes", with its highly emotional language, piercing refrain and its

technique of contrast and counterpoint. The heroic couplet, in The Revolt of Hindostan, was mainly adopted by Jones to make it easy for his readers to follow the ideas expressed as well as to give punch to his satirical portraits of non-working-class institutions and social classes.

Shelley's influence on Jones seems to be pervasive. Shelleyan ideas of non-violence and passive resistance, and certain lines, as in the case of "Ye are many —— they are few", are readily taken up and echoed by the Chartist poet. The Revolt of Hindostan is patterned after The Revolt of Islam, Queen Mab and "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills". Like Shelley too, Jones drew several of his most effective images from nature and was also endowed with this peculiar power of humanizing natural phenomena. However, his Victorianism and awareness of social evils drew him away from romanticism and gave his poetry a deeply-imbibed realistic tincture.

CHAPTER VI

Gerald Massey : A Meteor Quickly Extinguished

Gerald Massey is another example of a fine autodidact. Unlike Ernest Jones who was born into an upper middle-class family, Massey came from a very poor family. His own circumstances inclind him, when he grew up, towards radicalism. He was born in a small stone-hut near Tring, in Herts, in May 1828. His father was a boatman whose earnings amounted to ten shillings a weak. To supplement his father's slender gains, he was sent to work in a silk factory at the age of eight, which made him know the workers' suffering at first hand. He had to rise up at five 0'clock in the morning and toil till half past six in the evening. It was hellish for the little boy and when the mill was burnt down, he joined the other children who stood for twelve hours rejoicing at the sight of fire. But then he was sent to the unwholesome work of straw-plaiting. There the boy had racking attacks of ague. It was during this period of illness that his mother sent him to a penny school to learn whatever he could be taught by a poorly educated teacher. Looking back on his early life, Massey later wrote : "I had no childhood. Ever since I can remember, I have had the aching fear of want, throbbing in

heart and brow".[1]

In his boyhood, the Bible and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress were the only books he could get hold of. Afterwards he read Robinson Crusoe, a few old Wesleyan magazines and some battle histories. When he went to London at the age of fifteen, his range of readings greatly widened and his love for knowledge led him to read several books in different fields. As an errand-boy, he underwent many hardships which set him to analyse the causes of misery and social anomalies. He now began to attend political meetings and read political writings by Paine, Volney, Howitt, Louis Blanc and others. The French Revolution of 1848 deeply influenced him and gave his thoughts a definite direction. In 1849, he started The Spirit of Freedom, a cheap journal written entirely by working men. His rebelliousness and fiery nature made him join the ranks of the Chartists and to G.J. Harney's The Red Republican, he contributed several of his best poems. Voices of Freedom and Lyrics of Love, his first collection of poetry, was published in 1851. Lacking a firm ideological basis, he was soon lured away from Chartism by the Christian Socialists, mainly F.D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley. In later years he disappointed his admirers by turning away from poetry and devoting his time to such studies as mesmerism, phrenology

1. Quoted in Samuel Smiles's article on Massey in Eliza Cook's Journal, 1851, and included in Massey's Poetical Works, London, 1861, p. xi.

and Egyptology. As an Egyptologist, he sought, according to James Milne, to "illumine the history of mankind from its beginnings in ancient Egypt, to him, the storied cradle of the race".[2] His political and literary activities brought him in touch with well-known freedom fighters such as Mazzini, Garibaldi and the Hungarian Kossuth as well as with Tennyson, Browning and George Eliot. It was the latter who wrote Felix Holt, the Radical, with Massey serving as a prototype to the hero.

On joining the Chartist Movement, Massey added his efforts to those of Harney and Jones and tried to revitalize it. As secretary to the Working Tailors' Association, he organised support for the Movement. His association with the down-trodden as well as with radical writers gave a definite shape to his social and political views and made him aware of the necessity of creating and diffusing class- consciousness among the working classes. As a Chartist, he advocated the use of force. However, his belief in violence did not last long, for, on the one hand, his youthful enthusiasm subsided; on the another, he came to realize that the Chartists, at that time, were too few and divided to pursue such a policy successfully. He put emphasis on the idea of working-class solidarity and, in his poem "The League of Labour", advises

2. J.A. Milne, "A Silent Singer", in Book Monthly, July 1905, p. 703.

the workers to be "One in the League of Labour/ As Brothers hand in hand".[3] Education, he believed, helps develop the sense of morality among the masses. Ignorance and superstition were in his view the obstacles that were blocking the way of working men to achieve progress. He maintained that the poor's miseries were the product of man-made institutions controlled by the rich and the privileged. His active participation in the Chartist Movement reveals the poet's serious bend of mind and attitude towards his fellow-workers.

After studying the causes of social cleavage, Massey came to the conclusion that wealth and privilege were the mainspring of social conflicts and social inequalities. The gap between the rich and the poor, he attributed, to the economic injustices perpetrated by the privileged. In his writings, he makes it clear that privileges have to be done away with and calls upon the workers to cement their class allegiance. The rich and the privileged, he says, are in league against the poor and in his article, "Cassock or Republican", he writes :

> the Cassocks of statecraft, the Cassocks of Priestcraft, and of the Bourgeoisie, comprehend their position since 1848, and accordingly have

3. G. Massey, My Lyrical Life, London, 1896, vol. II, p. 421.

> leagued together in a mutual bond of Ruffian-hood, to crush and exterminate Republicanism and Socialism. [4]

He naturally comes to the conclusion that the league of the rich has to be broken up and, in the same article, points out the need of the working classes for unity and organisation to smash tyranny, and to achieve social freedom he calls for the use of force.

He believed that just distribution of wealth is of paramount importance to the working class. The present economic system, he maintained, tends to enrich a few idlers at the expense of the real producers. He asserted linking of wages to profits and that there should be a rise in wages when there is a rise in profits, and attributed the conflicts between the employed and the employers to the unjust relationship between the distribution of wages and profit.

He also defended the freedom of the press to ventilate the grievances of the poor and regarded it as a fundamental part of the latter's political rights. Freedom of speech, in his view, is a prelude to political and social salvation. In the "Song of the Red Republican", he exhorts the people to 'Speak, and the world shall answer with her voices myriad-fold'.[5]

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4. G. Massey, "Cassock or Republican", Red Republican, June 22, 1850.
5. "Song of the Red Republican", in Massey's Poetical Works, p. 308.

Massey deeply and reverently believed in the seriousness of the poet's mission and his commitment to the cause of the poor. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there had been a growing awareness, among writers, of the close link between poetry and society. A poet's role was not confined to entertaining readers but also to instil in them nobler thoughts. To Thomas Gray, the bard was a prophet telling significant tales of the future. Robert Burns blends several of his peculiar Scottish poems with social satire. Shelley, who is probably the most outspoken on this point, says :

> poets, ..., are not only the authors of languages and music, of the dance and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion. 6

Carlyle, in Heroes and Hero Worship, writes of the great poet, as Horace and the Romans had done before, as a prophet too. Ernest Jones's poet is a militant man who is neither fettered by tyranny nor tamed by malice but goes on singing of the right. To Massey, a poet is a glow-worm which shines in the dark but whose service is ignored and looked down upon. He raises the banner of love, wedded to Beauty and stands aloof from 'the money-grubbing world'.[7] Massey's supreme desire,

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6. Shelley, A Defence of Poetry, in Complete Works, N.Y., 1965, vol. VII, p. 112.
7. Massey, My Lyrical Life, vol. I, p. 224.

as he expresses it towards the end of his poem, "A Poet's Love-Letter", is to give utterance to the dumb world of the poor and make some conquest for them before he dies. In "The Patriot to His Love", he also tenderly but warningly asks her :

> Have you counted the cost to stand by me,
> In the battle I fight for Man?
> Shall your womanly love deify me,
> Who stand under the world's dark ban?[8]

Several poems, which Massey wrote as a Chartist, embody his radical ideas. In the preface to My Lyrical Life, he writes : 'Much of my verse is bound up with the political and patriotic life of our time".[9] And among the topics which figure prominently in his poetry, and which will be dealt with hereafter, are those of freedom, the future, tirades against kings, and priests, the rich-and-poor hiatus, unemployment, and internationalism.

The Chartists, in Massey's view, offered sacrifices and held out the promise of liberty, justice and social equality. To those political activists who soon despair and cease to participate in the struggle to promote the cause of the poor and improve their lot, he says that those who fight for freedom do not win easily in an hour. In his poem, "It Will End in

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8. Ibid., vol. II, p. 186.
9. Ibid., vol. I, p. x.

The Right", he exhorts his fellow comrades to fight tyrants and hold up freedom's hope to the bound millions. The torch of freedom, he reminds the rich, is a sacred one lit by God and will go on burning forever. Despite all hindrance its fire will never die out. He also warns that all those who try to invert the torch or put it upside down, or those who make attempts to stay the upward flame will get themselves scorched. Even in his love poetry, Massey devotes several lines or verse-paragraphs to the cause of freedom. In "The Young Poet to His Wife", for example, he says that his life was dull and grim until Freedom touched his eyes and, as a Divinity, led his way in 'Life's darkened ways'. As a result, everything changed in his view and wore a brightened look. Of Freedom, he writes :

> Birds sang of her, and all their happy hearts
> Rang out in music, Leaves clapped faery hands,
> The flowers for joy stood tearful in her glory,
> And World went singing unto World of Freedom.
> And I would blazon her heroic name,
> Sing such proud poeans as touch the world to tears,
> Or chariot it to battle in her Cause. 10

The images, expressed in these lines, are neither original nor impressive; yet, they transcend the directness of political poetry and are, therefore more appealing and refreshing. They also reflect his deep-rooted belief in freedom and his

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10. Ibid., vol. II, p. 131.

awareness that it is of paramount importance in the struggle for changing society radically.

Massey devotes several of his poems to call upon the people to rise and fight for liberty, describes their triumphant march and foretells their victory. In one of his fiery poems, "The Red Banner", first published in Harney's Red Republican in 1850 and then reprinted with a few alterations in his Poetical Works under the new title, "Songs of The Red Republican", the poet passionately exhorts the 'soldiers of Freedom' to rally to the cause and fling out the red banner. Wherever humanity is pleading, he says, free men should strike for liberty. Earnestly he appeals to the 'Champions of Right' to gather and, thunder like, to smite oppression. His address is made mainly to the labourers, described as 'The Titan of Toil', promising them joy in the conflict. Tyranny, he writes, mistakenly thinks that it is powerfully entrenched and that the people's hope is faint. But, he adds,

> Freedom's Altar burns hour by hour,
> Live brands for the fire-damps with which
> ye are mined. 11

He affirms that freedom's seed is firmly taking root in the bones of the martyred patriots and fed with their blood.

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11. Massey, Poetical Works, p. 334.

tyrants, he maintains, are shaking with fear for the slaves are awakening and 'the foot-fall of Freedom' is fast beating.

The inflated language of "The Red Banner" is almost completely absent from the more lyrical, "The People's Advent". In it he says that the people's long-cherished hopes of centuries are at last blossoming and the world is growing brighter as a result of the sacrifices of freedom fighters. He simply and beautifully expresses his firm belief in the unvanquishable power of the people :

> Creeds, Empires, systems, rot with age,
> But the great People's ever youthful!
> And it shall write the Future's page,
> To our humanity more truthful! 12

He also declares, in the same poem, that when the dark shadows of priests are no longer cast on the poor, and kings, the 'world-wide curse', are removed, the time will come for all the people to live as brothers and cease to sting each other with 'brain-scorpion words'. The poet's deeply held belief, as reflected in his poem, is that the tyrants' thrones are crumbling and that in due course of time they will be overthrown. They cannot keep off the coming day when the dawning light grows stronger.

In order to arouse the people from their apathy,

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12. Ibid., p. 325.

Massey tries to shock them into action. In "Our Fathers Are Praying for Pauper-Pay", he tells them that smitten stones and trodden worms violently react and categorically calls them cowards because they cringe and fall prostrate before the tyrants who torture them. The refrain of the poem reflects the stark and shocking reality of the poor's life, the abject, miserable conditions of the elders as well as the unceasing toil and degradation of the youngers :

> Our Fathers are praying for Pauper-pay,
> Our Mothers with Death's kiss are white;
> Our Sons are the rich man's Serfs by day,
> And our Daughters his Slaves by night. 13

The lingering rhythm of these lines contrasts with the leaping one of the second stanza in which he condemns the negative and indifferent attitude of the poor. With rousing and fast-beating rhythm, the poet calls upon them to trade death for death and life for life and to resort to violence rather than die slowly. Like Wordsworth in his sonnet, "London 1802", he raises the spectre of past heroes who, though in minority, were brave and peerless and contrasts their actions with those of his contemporaries whose hearts beat without courage :

> Fearless and few were the Heroes of old,
> Who played the peerless part :
> We are fifty-fold, but the gangrene Gold
> Hath eaten out Hampden's heart. 14

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13. Ibid., p. 310.
14. Ibid.

But Massey ends his poem on a hopeful note by maintaining that the sound of Democracy's footsteps fills the world with thrill and impels the people to fight for freedom and right.

To achieve intensity and compression, the poet, like ballad-writers, makes use of the technique of 'montage' or of isolated action shots. The series of successive vivid images used by the poet help create a sense of doom against which the oppressed are asked to revolt. They also set up their imaginative reverberations. The meaning is reinforced and effectively brought out by the parallelism in phrase and idea as well as in rhythm and alliteration.

"The Men of Forty-Eight" celebrates the fallen heroes of Freedom and sounds true and hopeful. Like Yeats in his "Easter 1916", Massey recognises that through the events of that year ordinary men have achieved an admirable heroic stature and intensity. They have shown the divine element in what is basically mortal. By their noble sacrifice, he says, they have attained permanence and immortality, for 'Their hearts pulse thro' the time'. With this juxtaposition of the finite and the infinite, the poem undoubtedly gains in depth and power. Like Lear, the poet also philosophises over the misfortunes of life and tries to dig comfort out of defeat :

As grass is greenest trodden down,
So suffering makes men great,
And this dark tide shall richly crown
The work of Forty-eight. 15

These images bring back to mind the famous concept succintly put by the old vanquished king, "Ripeness is all".

In the poem, the brave Greeks and Spartans are resurrected in order to confer glory on the fallen men of 1848 who had unlimited faith in the triumph of the cause of Freedom. The last stanza holds out the hope in the future when the world will wake up again to shake off the tyrants and when Freedom's summons, like rare music, will arouse all true hearts to noble action.

The poem undeniably succeeds in infusing the reader with enthusiasm and love for liberty as well as with firm belief in its future victory. The mode of presentation is not only emotional; it is philosophical and historical. The images give edge to the meaning, as in referring to the fighters' souls as unsheathed swords flashing out. The rhythm, similar to martial music, is steady and powerful; its regular beat reassures the heart. The style is also clearly energetic and endowed with irresistible force. All these elements combine harmoniously together to give punch to the poem and make it one

15. Ibid., p. 303.

of Massey's best Chartist pieces.

If "The Men of Forty-Eight" mainly glorifies the sacrifices of the men of that year, "To-Day and To-Morrow" underlines the poet's belief in a better and happy future. In stanza after stanza, the dismal present is contrasted with the bright days to come :

> Our birds of song are silent now,
> There are no flowers blooming!
> Yet life is in the frozen bough,
> And Freedom's Spring is coming![16]

To infuse working men with hope and enthusiasm, Massey makes use of his readings in the Bible and tells them that if they are in the Wilderness today, they will reach the Promised Land tomorrow. Though our bark, he says, is a ground today, it will float to-morrow. The evil Few find their antithesis in the oppressed Many and the poet assures his readers that the former will not remain in control forever nor will the Many moil in sorrow. The powers of Hell, on the ascendance now, are counterpoised by their overthrow in the future when Christ will rise. Emphatically the workers are told that they who bear the Cross at present will wear the Crown in the days ahead.

The poem echoes, in a way, the theme of Jones's

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16. Ibid., p. 23.

"Our Summons". But, despite similarity, the two poems are noticeably different in at least three important senses. Jones, as has been pointed out before, writes in his poem as an outsider, as he in fact was at the time, addressing the labourers and workers, while Massey writes, by virtue of being a working man, as one of the suffering and exploited masses. Second, Massey's images, unlike those used by Jones, are mainly biblical. The Bible, to the self-educated poet, was a rich source for his metaphorical language. Third, Massey's poem, too, is more lyrical than Jones's; the latter's has a more aggressive beat and is tuned to martial music. However, both poets show skill and are adept in using the technique of parallelism and counterpoint.

In defending the cause of freedom, Massey directs his shafts at both kings and priests. In "The Song of the Red Republican", re-entitled "The Patriot", kings are described as 'crown'd paupers' and priests as "Hell's midnight Thugs". The poem is highly charged with vehement emotions and, in strong terms, condemns tyranny and its accomplices. Tyrants, the poet says, forge fetters and make chains; their cup brims with guilt. They fatten on live hearts, madden over the hot blood-wine, and, with bloody hands, tear off all the Mind's jewels. Men are tortured and murdered by them. Although they

strike and oppress the poor today, the poet foretells their coming doom. It will be a happy day when the time will come and their bloody sword kiss the dust. But the 'Eternal Murder' is still throned, propped up by the priests who desecrate Rome's patriotic heritage. The oppressors, Massey says, still trample the poor like worms under their feet and their hearts are drained to death. To counteract this formidable picture of tyrants, the poet tries to encourage the poor and flatters them by saying that their army is marching with sublime steps and that the herald of their salvation is in the womb of Time. He hails the revolutions in France and Hungary and affirms that the martyrs' blood will blossom and 'Crown the world with glory'. He threatens to tread down all kings in order to uplift the trodden slaves. The future, the poem asserts, will witness the tyrants' fetters snapping under the hammering blows of the poor's file. In each life-throb of England, the poet can hear freedom ringing its tocsin. The slaves are digging the graves of tyrants whose doom is sealed for brave spirits are sounding oppression's knell. Old England is waking up and her Crownwellian spirit is once more on the move. The poet warningly says that a stern struggle is ahead but the people's heart is longing for the fray. Kenneth Muir once said that Massey writes with desperate simplicity of the poor and their plight[17] and the truth of his remark is borne out by this poem

17. Kenneth Muir, "Shelley's Heirs", in The Penguin New Writing, 1945, No. 26, p. 128.

in which both despair and simplicity are intermixed.

In "They Are But Giants While We Kneel", Massey continues his crusade against kings, princes and priests. In exhortative language, he tells the people to trust neither kings nor princes, who break their hearts and grind their faces in the dust. The rich are scornfully referred to as 'The Palace Paupers' and the priests ironically called 'The Champions of the Christ'. The latter are described as corrupt for being bribed by the former to keep quiet. The poet calls upon the people to unite so that they can crush anything that kills love and liberty. The poem's refrain sums up the poet's message to the poor :

> They are but Giants while we kneel : One Leap
> And Up Go We.

He asks the people not to trust priests whose hearts have grown hard and cold and whose tears are lies. The Church and the State, in his view, are in league to fleece the poor and desolate the land. Towards its end, the poem becomes less declamatory and more lyrical. The poet consolingly looks forward to the future when :

> The merry flowers are springing from last year
> Martyrs' mould,
> As their dreams had taken blossom telling what
> they would have told;

> Of all our rainbowed future : and what this
> earth shall be
> When we have bartered blows and bonds for life
> and liberty. 18.

The passage is admirable and praiseworthy. It reflects the poet's love for both nature and man and the value he attaches to both of them. Its images are beautiful and fresh and stand witness to Massey's artistic faculties which are not to be despised. The dialectics of death transformed into life and of dreams blossoming into reality are cleverly manipulated as the above-quoted lines demonstrate. Contrast is also drawn between the dismal present and the happy future envisaged. Balance and alliteration, too, add to the musical effect of the last line. The poem in fact proves beyond doubt the poet's sensitivity to rhythm and music.

The rich-poor hiatus is highlighted, dwelt upon and strongly denounced by Massey. In 'Merry Christmas Eve", he contrasts the way Christmas is celebrated by the rich in their palaces and the poor in hovels. In the palace, the poet says, all the treasures the world can render are shown by the rich knaves, dressed in silk and adorned with jewels. They celebrate Christmas with music, dance and drink. They enjoy themselves unmindful of the hearts moaning in the streets. Even Falstaff, the 'prince of Lies' as described in the poem,

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18. Poetical Works, Op.Cit., 313.

would be sick to listen to their hypocrisy and flattery, But in the poor man's hovel lives a famished family. In the sound of the church bells, they only hear their mockers. laughing at them. They remember their darling dead who will never return to them but hear no kind voice to allay their grief. They miserably and helplessly look at each other as one of them lies 'hunger-kill'd' and the mother's tears are 'a bosom-babe's food'. Such misery, Massey points out, nurses crime. Man, he says, was created in the image of God but now the 'god-stamp' has been erased and vanished. Human beings are divided into tyrants and slaves. The few, like gods, stride the earth and rule it ruthlessly, while the millions are murdered like worthless pawns. Priests come in for harsh criticism for shrouding Christ's message in sophistry and defending the status quo. The poet anxiously and expectantly awaits the dawn of Liberty and ends his poem by calling upon the people to rise against tyranny whose symbols 'are ceasing to win'. The poem, as in several other poems by Massey, fluctuates unimpressively between denunciation of the rich and pathetic defence of the poor, and ends with expressive hope in the future.

In "All's Right With The World", the poet muses philosophically but ironically over the illusion and reality of human

affairs. The golden dawn, he says, is turning into sun-flooded day. The birds are singing as the sun mounts her 'sapphire throne'. The earth is yielding rich harvests 'As tho' man nestled in the lap of Love'. Spring clothes the earth with tender beauty as if she knew no sorrow and no hearts were breaking. But this is a façade, mere seeming. It is only a 'silken-folded mask'; if removed, Hell itself will be revealed. The poor, in fact, are murdered while the rich are irresponsibly melting the pearl of their life in 'Pleasure's chalice'. Revenge, the poet warns, looms large in the future when wrongs will be righted. At the end of the poem, Massey threateningly alludes to the fate of old Sodom :

> So Sodom, grim old Reveller! went to death.
> Voluptuous Music throbb'd through all her courts,
> Mirth wanton'd at her heart, one pulse before
> Fire-tongues told out her bloody tale of wrong, —
> And all went right, and merrily, with the world.19

The poem reveals Massey's love for nature as reflected in the images he draws of the dawn, the wood, the birds and the earth in springtime. It also shows him trying to pierce through the colourful surface to reach the abysmal truth.

One of the Massey's most touching poems deals with the agonizing conditions of the unemployed. In quick, successive touches, "The Cry of the Unemployed" draws a panorama of the

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19. Ibid., p. 343.

world with its blue sky and manna dropping in golden showers, with paths of flowers emanating fragrant breath and fed with silver dew, with trees blooming and bees and birds feeding on their honeyed fruit, with music in the wood, and the earth garlanded with plenty. It is a nostalgic picture which hankers back to a golden age which is effectively used to contrast with the miserable facts surrounding the speaker who is born to bemoan his lot. Despite his willingness to toil he has no work to do. Amidst plenty, he has nothing to eat and feels hungry. He broods philosophically over the nature of gold and how it is made use of by men. His meditation makes him realise that the contemporary industrial scene has turned gold, which could have been a blessing to humanity, into a charm shutting up human hearts from nature and estranging/from brother. It is made into a mist between God and men. The hungry cries of the speaker's children make him give up his meditation and, lance-like, pierce his heart. Irony is resorted to when he says that love is only for the guilded, for they are made of nobler clay. How society turns men into brutes is revealed in his expressed wish to tear out his feeling heart because, to him, it became a curse. The workhouse comes in for bitter criticism in the speaker's abhorrence of the place and his deep indignation at the idea of joining it. He prefers 'to wear the Pauper's iron within, than drag the Convict's chain'.

The poem is distinguished with its clarity and simplicity and the words used could not be simpler. Its success in giving expression to the speaker's passions adds to its lyricism and the last stanza is not lacking in dramatic qualities. The refrain is deeply pathetic and melancholic. However, the melancholy does not lead to pessimism and despair but to an expression of social protest accompanied with a sense of dignity. The speaker's disgust with the social reality, of a world divided into wealth and poverty, plenty and starvation, culminates in his dramatic internal conflict, reflected in his poetic outburst :

> 'Tis the worst curse of Poverty to have a feeling heart :
> Why can I not, with iron-grasp, tear out the tender part?[20]

The use of caesura in this last line shows the speaker struggling with his spasmodic and violent emotions, trying to control them.

During the 1840s and '50s, many foreign exiles and emigrés took their residence in London. Italy and Hungary at the time were under foreign rule and fighting for national independence. The Poles were also in constant revolt against Russian domination. Under the despotic rule of Louis Napoleon,

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20. Ibid., p. 332.

many national democrats fled France. German revolutionaries, Marx amongst them, took refuge in Britain. They were all supported by the Chartists who highly valued their sacrifices and took a common stand with them. Like all other Chartist writers, Massey too was an internationalist and extended his sympathy and support to European freedom fighters. In "New Year's Eve in Exile", he celebrates a meeting of warriors of Freedom in London. Their souls, he says, are heroic, roaming the world, tossed by wild waves. Their eyes and brows are kindled with their love for liberty. In their midst, someone rises to make a speech. He looked prophet-like 'as though he talkt with one beyond'. The speaker says that Europe's winter is dark and warns his audience of the Russian Bear, which throughout the nineteenth century represented the arch-enemy of progress. While the Bear, he says, is creeping stealthily on, the peoples of Europe are asleep. England has forgotten her Commonwealth heritage and her battle-armour has grown rusty with neglect. He longs for Milton's voice to waken her up and declaims her present in which Mammon has become her venerated and worshipped god. Despite the darkness abounding, he adds, Freedom's day is coming when the clouds will clear off and the streets be flushed with bright light.

Although the ideas included are conventional and sound rather hollow, they are wrapped in impressive images, as when

he says that Freedom, like a soothing mother, will take the world into her 'arms of light' and consequently the world's 'mask of gloom' will be lifted. A touch of lyricism is also found in parts of the poem as in his obvious reference to Shelley's question about the coming of spring. The poet, through his speaker, declares that beneath winter's snow, a world of hope is ripening and goes on to say :

> O come, thou Spring of God, and at thy voice
> The balmy blood shall beat in bud and leaf!
> And come, thou mellow rain, fall on it warm,
> And fondle it with kisses, drop rich tears;
> And blow, thou sweet Spring-wind, and make it stir
> With secret rapture - budding tenderly,
> With all the glory of its folded bloom,
> And all its fragrance striving for the light.[21]

The passage is effectively melodious and rich in significant images. The speaker aims at infusing his much battered and low-spirited audience with enthusiasm by arousing its hopes in a better and happier future. He draws on nature for an effective analogy and tells his fellow-exiles that the seeds of freedom sown by their martyrs lie buried in the ground and adds that when spring comes the fertile land, fondled tenderly with rain's warm kisses, will, 'with secret rapture', bud forth. The sexual image is thus beautifully and subtly drawn to endorse the speaker's argument and render it effective. It

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21. Ibid., p. 299.

not only develops images included in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" but also reveals traces of Keats's erotic ones. It also constitutes one of several touches and elements shedding light on Massey's poetic powers.

According to Dr. J.S. Bratton, the popular ballad in Victorian times became diffused and covered a wide-ranging spectrum of poems which can be divided, briefly and roughly speaking, into heroic, comic, domestic and propaganda ballads. Many contemporary artists devoted their talents to writing folk-songs exclusively. Added to this is the fact that, with the rapid growth of dozens of urban places, popular culture and country folk-songs spread out. In congenial literary atmosphere they flourished and proliferated. Topical verses became a regular feature in many newspapers and periodicals. The pages of Punch, which was founded in 1841, were filled with a variety of popular ballads, ranging widely from the comic to the most serious which attacked corruption and injustice.[22]

The ballad is an impersonal narrative, reflecting social attitudes. It heavily depends on the technique of contrast and counterpoint. The device of montage or the use of a series of rapid flashes is one of its important characteristics. The

22. See Bratton, Op. Cit. pp. 8, 12, 23, 31 and 32.

main end of ballads is to present the story dramatically and, for this purpose, they have their own peculiar rhetoric. Parallalism in phrase and idea is one of their rhetorical devices and incremental repetition is the favourite way of developing this parallelism.

The use of the ballad as a weapon in social and political controversies by Romantic poets, such as Blake, Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley, set an example for Victorian poets. The ballads of the common man received attention from several balladeers. The suffering child became conspicuously prominent in the ballad of sentiment. Children or women in variously dire situations are pitifully depicted. Death, side by side with hopeless, degraded children, looms large in many of these ballads. Reforming zeal was the main inspiration of all such writers who dealt with those topics. Thomas Hood's "Song of the Shirt" and "The Bridge of the Sighs", published in Punch in 1843 and 1844 respectively, sparked off hundreds of imitations and the response to his ballads of social protest was enormous. Several Chartist writers, including Massey and Jones, who were naturally deeply concerned with the plight of the poor, aimed at bringing to light the squalor of the urban centres and the poverty of many of their inhabitants.

Massey found in the ballad, as a tragic tale or a story

of suffering, a convenient vehicle to produce beneficial effects in his readers. Like Wordsworth and Auden, he was also profoundly attracted to its simplicity, directness as well as its closeness to common life. His poem, "Little Willie", is an attempt on his part to arouse the social conscience from its stupor and disregard for a member of the lower classes who is neither threatening nor morally suspect. The theme of the poem is that of an innocent child's life and death as a social problem connected with the role of the workhouse. In it, pathos and sentimentality are mixed. The poet assures the persona of Willie's young companion, but the principle of impersonality, as an important characteristic of the ballad in general, is not violated here for the protagonist is hardly an individual but a type.

The reader of the poem is presented with a portrait of a young, naughty and brave boy who looked wise and smiled quietly and quaintly but has since died and been buried in a workhouse grave. From the very beginning and with a few swift touches, one's attention is drawn to the contrast between active life and passive death. Willie's life and death are also parallaled and contrasted with the cycle of life in general, the end of a year and the coming of another accompanied with gaiety and mirth. Parallelism in phrase and rhyme is a

technique cleverly manipulated by the poet, as in :

> In the day we wandered foodless,
> Little Willie cried for bread!
> In the night we wandered homeless,
> Little Willie cried for bed.
> Parted at the Workhouse door,
> Not a word we said :
> Ah, so tired was poor Willie,
> And so sweetly sleep the dead.[23]

In stanza 3, the little child is compared with a lily blooming in the dirt. The image is apparently a variation on the traditional ballad's motif of plants springing from lovers' graves. It also reveals by implication the poet's criticism of urban squalor. The contrast between the quiet within the tomb and the wildness without is underlined in stanza 5, which also covertly warns the readers of the outcome of the negligence of the poor by the rich. But the threat implied is quickly submerged and smoothed over in the final stanza, added later in Massey's life, in the contrast between the cruel world and a benignant, compassionate Heaven, resulting in a yielding and resigned attitude, which runs contrary to Chartist militant tenets. However, the poem's effect is created rather by quietness and understatement than by exaggeration.

Women, too, have their place in Massey's songs and ballads. "Christie's Poor Old Gran" tells of an old woman whose active life has been spent in toil. Her life and

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23. My Lyrical Life, vol. I, p. 252.

struggles are being narrated to her little grandson. The first six stanzas tell of the harships she has been through, while, in the last three stanzas, care and comfort are pledged. Her life, the narrator says, has been quite busy because she always helped at different functions, such as weddings, births and deaths. And, in an effective and lovely stanza, he assures her that her life is not wasted for she is now happily surrounded by her grand-children :

> And little laughing stars shall rise
> On Poor Old Gran!
> In the clear heaven of Childhood's eyes,
> For Poor Old Gran!
> Wee fingers stroking her gray hair,
> Shall almost melt the hoarfrost there,
> Wee lips shall kiss away the care
> From Poor Old Gran! 24

The narrative is not that of a continuous sequence of events; the art of the poem lies rather in the selection and juxtaposition of separate flashes. The technique used is that of folksongs replete with a chorus-line and repetition and parallelism in abundance. The motif of the sons growing up and emigrating to urban centres, which was common in the Victorian popular ballad, is made use of as when the narrator says that she has been through thick and thin for the sake of her sons who, in their search for work, had to go away and

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24. Ibid., vol. I, pp. 250-251.

leave her behind. Contrast is also resorted to when her old age and the frailty of her face are put against the light of grace beaming in her eyes.

In a short time and at a relatively young age G. Massey, the poor, self-educated poet achieved fame and success. But his denunciation of kings and priests and his crusade against tyranny were of so general a nature that contemporary critics and class enemies realized that he had no firm ideological basis. They could see that his inflated language yielded no definite or concrete class concepts. The Christian Socialists lured him away from Chartism and Massey soon followed in the footsteps of Thomas Cooper. His Christian Socialist leanings come out clearly in his long literary ballad, "Lady Laura", which is, partially, Alton Locke retailed in poetry. As Alton is saved and enlightened by Eleanor, in Kingsley's novel, so is the poor peasant by Lady Laura in Massey's poem. The latter, apart from its ideological content and rambling events, can sometimes be movingly effective as in the image of little children 'who have spun/ The life of Infancy into silk'. It also acquires a new height of lyricism in the description of Lady Laura and the green valley surrounding her palace :

There, with her emerald chalice, Spring
Kneels, offering beauty's wine;

There, in a land of enchantment, sing
    The birds thro' shower and shine.
'Tis a noble solitude serene,
    Where the sudden glory glows!
In a happy nook of nestling green,
    That virginal flower blows, —
Just in the sweetness of the bud,
    Brimming with brightness and balm;
The tenderest glimpse of Womanhood
    Golden, and sweet, and calm.
She is the Lily of the land;
    Born neither to spin nor toil:
She can rest her fair cheek on her dainty white hand,
    While the human honey-bees moil. 25

The poem, too, makes use of some motifs frequently found in Victorian ballads, such as horrific tribulations in the shape of poverty and ill-treatment meted out to an innocent creature who is finally rescued by the forces of charitable benevolence. It also reflects Massey's desertion of the cause of Chartism, a desertion which becomes even clearer and more pronounced in Havelock's March. The latter is diametrically opposed to Jones's stand in defending the Indians in The Revolt of Hindostan, but nearer in spirit to Tennyson's "The Defence of Lucknow". Massey, like Tennyson, puts the blame fairly and squarely on the rebellious Indians and becomes unashamedly jingoistic in his attitude.

While a Chartist, Massey wrote "The Deserter From The Cause", which was obviously written under the influence of

25. Poetical Works, Op.cit., p. 134.

Browning and bears similarity to his poem, "The Lost Leader". Ironically the poem can be patly applied to Massey himself, who later turned out to be, like Wordsworth, a turncoat.

Massey was of a passionate nature but not a deep thinker. He wrote lays of freedom, lyrics of love as well as popular and literary ballads. His political utterances are characterized with vehement revolutionary sentiments but do not reflect any concrete or definite ideology. True, several of his poems are heavily loaded with the theme of class conflict. But seriousness of purpose, in denouncing the rich and defending the poor and in upholding the causes of freedom and justice, does not often conceal the hollowness of his sentiments. He directs his tirades mainly against kings, priests and landlords. He rarely tries to philosophise, but when he does his poems gain in depth and richness. Despite heavy politicizing his poetry reflects his love for nature, which endows scores of his poems with sweet and rare lyricism.

The vast majority of his poems are exclusively addressed to the working class and he speaks passionately to them. He exhorts, counsels and tries to inspire them with his vigorous nature. In order to move the workers and arouse them, he sometimes uses shocking language and insulting epithets. He

can easily be carried away with his enthusiasm and earnestness. His language, on the one hand, is emotional, expressive, and rich; on the another, inflated and declamatory. Harney once criticised Massey for "a painful striving for effect by means of big words and monstrous phantasies".[26] In his exhortations to the exploited poor, he frequently resorts to the use of the command form and exclamation marks. Personification is also made abundant use of. Massey too was well-read in the Bible and his images, for the most part, are based on it. Some of them are fresh and beautiful; others are impressive and sonorous. However, they sometimes sound hollow and give a sense of emptiness. Several of his Chartist songs of freedom are characterised with desperate simplicity but they also throb with a touch of lyricism. His rhythm is sometimes leaping, sometimes lingering. His martial music is endowed with irresistible force. Undeniably, he was a genuine songster whose ear was sensitive to rhythm.

The art of balladry attracted Massey and he makes good use of it. His passionate and earnest discontent with men and social institutions finds an outlet in this popular form of poetry. His poems embody typical ballad virtues, such as shrewd criticism of society, sturdy realism and powerful rhythm.

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26. "Poetry for the People", in The Friend of the People, II, (3 May 1851), p. 196.

But they are usually blended with pathos and sentimentality. They were intended for simple, working-class people and are accordingly written in a direct and simple diction and rooted in common speech. The technique of montage, as a series of rapid flashes and by means of which compression and earnestness are achieved, is cleverly handled by Massey. Contrast, parallelism and counterpoint are devices he mastered and excellently manipulated. His ballads are impersonal, in the sense that they are utterances of the public voice, and the characters they present are rather types. He not only learned and included in his poems several ballad motifs; he also effectively contributed and passed some of them on to the Victorian ballad legacy. Commenting on "The Relief of Lucknow", which constitutes part of his Havelock's March, Dr. Bratton has this to say :

> Its details passed rapidly into ballad mythology, and many hands worked over the starving women and children, the thinning ranks of defenders, the march of Havelock and his men, dying all the way, the corporal's wife within the defences who heard the slogan of the Highlanders and the tune of 'The Campbells are Comin' far off, before any-one else could believe that they were fighting for anything but their honour. 27

27. J.S. Bratton, Op. Cit., p. 68.

Massey was a poet of great promise but his resources soon dried up. Like a meteor he brightly shone for a short while in the realm of poetry but quickly got himself extinguished.

CONCLUSION

The Industrial Revolution took place first in Britain and gave birth to the first working class in the world. The Chartist Movement, with all its strengths and weaknesses, was the true expression of the level of political and economic consciousness the English working class attained in the first phase of industrialisation. The Chartists embodied all the virtues and vices of the different sections of the workers at the time. They fought against the combined forces of reaction, Tories and Whigs, as well as those of the then rather fresh and strong middle class. They committed mistakes for which they paid dearly. The struggle they waged was not for the interests of a few individuals but for their whole class. The sacrifices they offered, the atrocities they underwent, and the courage with which they faced them are signs of the richness of the experience.

Contemporary fiction writers, in their reaction to the Movement, can roughly be divided into two main camps : upholders and disclaimers. To Mrs Gaskell, Disraeli and Kingsley, Chartism is something to be dreaded and frowned upon as it begets violence and shatters their peaceful world. They acknowledge the presence of deep-rooted social problems and, in their novels, join Carlyle in an effort to sound the alarm

in order to waken up the ruling classes from their slothful sleep, and make them aware of the explosive situation. But they do not go, or do not want to go, deep into the reasons of the social problems. Instead of following the class conflict to its bitter end, they shudder, shuffle, hang back, retrace their steps and walk off away from the abyss which opens up underneath their feet. To the political crisis, they offer personal solutions. In their novels, causes of unrest boil down to failure of communication between classes. Better understanding between Mr. Carson and John Barton, Egremont and Sybil, Lady Ellerton and Alton Locke is the way they offer for solving their problems.

As artists, these early Victorian novelists were not successful in giving an aesthetically rich portrait of Chartist workers. John Barton alone attains a rather high degree of artistic accomplishment. In conveying what he stands for, Mrs. Gaskell achieves success. Dignity of labour and the welfare of his class are his main concern. His portrait is undeniably impressive. That is why it is very much regretted that, in the middle of the novel, he is dropped and, in the end, made to die, Christian-like, in the arms of his class exploiter. Sybil reveals Disraeli's ignorance of the working class. It is ironical that the man who volunteered to tell

his class about working men was not well informed on the subject. To him, those poor people were mere flocks of sheep liable to be led astray by any demagogue. In his novel, the industrial revolution has no effect on his portrait of workers. They are, as they have been before, the pre-industrial lower classes. The same thing applies to Kingsley's Alton Locke, Wheeler's Arthur Morton and Jones's Edward. Alton, after a good start, is turned into a passive onlooker with no political spirit, and the action is taken over by a representative of Christian Socialism who persuades him to give up his Chartist convictions.

The actual history of the Chartist Movement forms the basic content of both Wheeler's and Jones's novels. Both Chartist writers dwell upon the weaknesses of the Movement which led to its defeat. Wheeler concentrates on the inadequacy of the leadership, particularly at moments of crisis, while Jones pays more attention to the immaturity and confusion of the Chartist workers which pave the way for a class enemy, masquerading as a genuine democrat and supporter of the Charter, to infiltrate their ranks and assume leadership. Another important point of difference between the two is that whereas Wheeler's hero is a Chartist worker, Jones's is a demagogue. However, the two writers have certain questions in

common. Both try through the medium of fiction to evaluate the Chartist experience and its pitfalls. They specifically wrote to counteract the slanderous picture of Chartism and Chartists as depicted by non-working-class writers. Their point of departure is the idea of class struggle and the irreconcilability of the interests of the employers and their employees. Their novels reflect the concept that even personal happiness under capitalism is more or less illusory, as the love stories of Arthur and Mary, of Mortimer and Adeline, and of Edward and Agnes imply.

All these novels, discussed in Chapters One and Two, are generally regarded as second - or third-rate achievements. Their artistic failure can be attributed to several reasons. Their authors saw in the novel, as the dominant literary form in the 'forties, a convenient vehicle to convey their political or religious message to the largest number of readers and to ensure the widest attention. Hence, the strong didactic tone they lapse in. They were also inhibited by their respective ideologies which kept intruding in these works of art. Third, they were unable to comprehend the new social forces. Even Wheeler and the early Jones had too much faith in the return-to-land movement and wrongly attributed social miseries to industrialisation. Consequently, their working-class

characters are either idealized victims or rioters and angry mobs. The characters, in many cases, are over-simplified and portrayed to stand for good or evil, as in moral fables. Another factor which contributes to the weakness of these novels is the often repeated intrusion of the author's voice so as to forcibly tilt the balance in favour of a certain idea or character. It is an act of artistic immorality.[1]

In the field of poetry, the picture is not much different. Chartist poets were possessed with the idea of reforming the world. The ideals fought for by the Movement found ample space in their poems. They tried to impress upon their readers the importance of political change and educational improvement. They satirized the heinous existing conditions and tried to draw a picture of a new, just, and moral world. They put emphasis on the necessity of limiting privilege and prejudice in order to increase the possibility of justice. Rearrangement of government and society and increase of knowledge, they believed, would naturally lead to progress.

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1. In his essay, "Morality and the Novel", D.H. Lawrence says :
> Morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance [Between the character and his circumambient Universe]. When the novelist puts his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality.

(D.H. Lawrence, "Morality and the Novel", in The Nineteenth Century Novel, (ed.) Arnold Kettle, p. 45).

They aspired to an international kind of world brotherhood, supported revolutionary and democratic movements in Europe, and extended their hand of friendship to European exiles living in Britain.

The Chartists were the poets of the underdog. Tirades against Monarchy, Church, landlordism and the middle class fill many a page of their works. Middle-class ideals, propagated by Malthusian utilitarians, were outright condemned as heartless, low and unchristian. The rich-poor hiatus, unity of workers, freedom and justice form part of their extensive topics. To compensate the poor for their miserable lot and to stir them to action, they often envisaged or dreamt of a golden age in which equality, truth and love prevailed and became the norm of life.

In their search for a new poetic tradition, these poets instinctively went back to Milton, Burns, Shelley and Byron, whom they eulogized and tried to imitate. Byron's virulent satires and Shelley's ideals and prophetic poems won their admiration and were popular among them. Even Tennyson and Browning were looked upon with a mixture of envy and admiration for their technical superiority. But it was from Ebenezer Elliott, the Cornlaw Rhymer, that they learnt ranting and

declamation. Their seriousness of purpose was, for the most part, unmitigated and unrelieved with humour.

Poetry, to the Chartists, was a weapon in the struggle for emancipation. To reflect the mind and feeling of the people was one of their cherished aims. Simple and clear were their thoughts and style. The sources of their poetry were partially found in folksongs, religious hymns, broadsides, and popular ballads. But some of them tried to write epics, sonnets and literary ballads. The Spenserian stanza and the heroic couplet were among the poetic forms they used. The Bible, to many Chartist poets, was a rich source of metaphors and vivid images. To contend against the ruling classes, satire and irony were also two of the deadly weapons cleverly wielded by them. They also resorted to the use of shocking language and abusive terms in order to arouse the workers from their political apathy. Exhortation and exclamation were frequently used. Their emotional language could sometimes be moving but is often inflated and sounds hollow.

Cooper's Purgatory of Suicides is coloured and imbibed with his Chartist principles. His epic is a passionate quest for a happy and fraternal society based on the supremacy of equality, justice, love and truth, and the poet's main object

in writing it was to inspire men to act and struggle. Its unity of structure, though sometimes weak, is not non-existent as Conklin and Ramage claim. Its political message is directly presented without the least resort to symbols and myths. Rhetorical speeches, descriptions and comments create an unmistakable sense of monotony. The Spenserian stanza, in the hands of Cooper, is more often than not, prosaic, sluggish and lacking in vigour. Nevertheless, the greater parts of the exordia are charged with the poet's sincere emotions and tolerable to read. The poem, reflects his acceptance of the Godwinian principle of perfectibility and resounds with echoes from several other poets, mainly Milton and Shelley. Despite serious faults, the poem includes some passages and episodes which are worthy of admiration.

In his early period, Jones's poems were mainly agitational in nature and simple in diction as well as in ideas and technique. Several of these songs were written to the tune of popular airs, and repetitive and parallelistic in design. His rhythms are often forceful and drum-like. Unlike many other Chartist poets, Jones was endowed with a sense of humour. But sentimentality vitiates some of his fairly good poems.

In his second phase, Jones's poems became more

argumentative and contemplative. Some are allegorical and sweetly lyrical and melodious. Several Shelleyan ideas were adopted by Jones, who also found in nature an inexhaustible source of impressive images. But his imitation of Shelley lacked the organic unity of the great Romantic poet. In his cycle of poems, Songs of Democracy, he produced some of his finest verses which clearly bear the stamp of folklore and popular balladry. The Revolt of Hindostan, an epic in miniature, is written in the true spirit of internationalism which aimed at supporting the peoples of the colonies, abolishing exploitation and establishing a New World founded on love and peace, similar to that envisaged by Cooper but more realistic. Jones, too, was successful in his use of the heroic couplet which lends greater compression and punch to his satire and irony and reveals his power at producing witty and pointed epigrams. Despite the imitative nature of some of his poems, Jones was undoubtedly talented and endowed with deep insight into life.

To Massey, 1848 was a turning point which led him to join the Chartists and, for a while, focussed the limelight of the literary world on him. His songs of freedom embody his radical ideas. They were consecrated to the cause of liberty and justice and against tyranny and the abject conditions of

the poor. The Bible provided him with images which, though unoriginal, added an appealing and freshening touch to his topics. He also drew on nature for some of his images. His rhythms, like those of ballads, are sometimes leaping, sometimes lingering but often suited to the meaning. The language he used is usually emotional, clear and energetic. When he philosophised, and that was rarely done, his poems gained in depth and power. His ability to handle the ballad form is convincingly displayed in several of his social and political poems. The ballads he wrote, whether in the popular or literary tradition, not only included motifs common at the time but he also contributed some of his own to the Victorian ballad tradition. Massey's poems on the whole are not void of artistic value but he soon deserted the field of poetry and turned his attention to other activities.

Cooper's wide range of knowledge is impressive and Massey's lyricism is praiseworthy. But it is Ernest Jones who, for his power of endowing nature with human characteristics, for his rhyme and rhythm, and for his use of the heroic couplet, stands out as the best Chartist poet. However, the failure of the Chartist Movement and its transitory nature as well as the low level of education attained by these poets, in general, were among the factors which worked against them and curtailed

their ability in establishing a new poetic tradition.

But the Chartist literary legacy, in both prose and verse, did not die out with the demise of the Movement. Its themes were continued by other writers, such as William Morris and Robert Tressell. Morris's cycle of poems, The Pilgrims of Hope and his two fictional works, A Dream of John Bull (1886-87) and News From Nowhere (1890) are conspicuous for the similarity of their themes to those of the Chartist writers. The golden age of Godwin and Shelley, and of Cooper and Jones, is dreamt of in A Dream of John Bull and, at a greater length, in News From Nowhere. It is noticeable that, in the former, Morris is mainly concerned with the egalitarian principle behind the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 — the same ideal with which Ernest Jones was pre-occupied in his article on "The Men of Kent and Essex - 1381".[2] News From Nowhere, too shows Morris seeking a future collectivity as a means of overcoming contemporary wretchedness.

A kindred spirit to the Chartists and their views is also found in Robert Tressell, author of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists, posthumously published in 1914. In its first chapter, there is a lively conversation in which impverished workmen discuss the causes of poverty, and the whole conversation

2. The Labourer, 1848, vol. III, pp. 11-17.

is a reminder, in a way, of an earlier one recorded by Jones in De Brassier, illustrating the views of the different divisions of the Chartists. Also, Barrington's argument, in Chapter 44 of Trassell's novel, against Mr Grinder's views on the identicality of the interests of the employers and of their workmen, is an echo, though put differently, of Arthur Morton's and Lady Julia's discussion of the same point in Wheeler's Sunshine and Shadow.

In our own times, the same argument is still carried on all the world over between the socialists, on the one hand, and their opponents, on the another. And all indications show that it will go on for some time in the future — a factor that underlies the importance of Chartist literature and its continued relevance to modern times. The material conditions, prevalent nowadays in many parts of the world as a result of industrialisation, have also had their impact on the literatures of several countries, which are developing along lines not much different from those of Chartist and early Victorian literature.

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